The Weir Farm:
Working Agriculture and the Vision
of Rural Life in New England
1860-1940

An essay prepared as the agricultural history
component of the Cultural Landscape Report for the
Weir Farm National Historic Site
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Introduction
This study was undertaken for the National Park Service's Weir Farm National Historic Site, Ridgefield and Wilton, Connecticut, to provide a basis for the interpretation of agricultural work and landscape, and the thematic dimensions of rural life on this remarkable New England farm site.

Weir Farm is largely situated in the town of Ridgefield, a community and landscape in southwestern Connecticut that has been settled by Europeans since 1708. The town's first chronicler, Rev. Samuel Goodrich., noted in his “Ridgefield in 1800” that “the soil right of sd tracts was purchased of the Natives at sundry times,” and provided an extensive list of Native American individuals and families who deeded the land over to the New English settlers from Norwalk and Milford. In the succeeding nearly three centuries the land has been extensively, overwhelmingly transformed. Little evidence remains of the clearings, moving corn and squash fields, hunting territories and fishing and trapping sites that the land known as Ridgefield had supported for many hundreds of years previously.

By the time the Beers farm in the outlying neighborhood of Branchville had been acquired by J. Alden Weir, families of English descent had been shaping the landscape, building farms and creating the structure of New England agriculture and rural life for many years. The Farm's landscape and buildings and activities cannot be understood without a sense of this inheritance; this historically shaped landscape and tradition was what

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1 Rev’d Samuel Goodrich, Ridgefield J.M. Hubbard, “The Rural Neighborhood,” Twenty-Fifth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1891 (Hartford, 1892)
Julian Weir himself was responding to with his own acts of possession, re­ 
visioning and transformation of the farm “among the rocks.”

Agriculture and Society in Ridgefield

Within a few decades after its settlement, Ridgefield was a town of two 
hundred or so modest-size farms, practicing the mixed agriculture, both 
pastoral and tillage, that characterized early New England. Virtually all of 
the field crops that Ridgefield farms, including the Weir Farm, were 
growing in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries were already 
traditional by 1800. “The land is very good for grass,” Reverend Goodrich 
wrote, and “at present produces good rye and Indian Corn ... large 
quantities of oats, Buckwheat, beans and peas... potatoes are very much 
used... There is plenty of apples for the inhabitants.” On their fields, 
Goodrich noted that Ridgefield farmers followed a crop rotation cycle in 
which they broke up “tough swaded grass ground” [pasture land] and 
sowed buckwheat, then planted rye the next year, followed it with corn, 
the most soil-exhausting crop, then planted oats. After oats they let the 
fields “lie unimproved but for pasture” again for a few years, after which 
the cycle began again. Ridgefield farmers followed English tradition in 
using oxen as their primary draft animals and horses for lighter work and 
transportation. “Our grain is universally threshed with flails and cleaned 
with a fan and a riddle, “ he noted, and” ... we raise plenty of squashes, 
cucumbers, muskmelons ...Our gardens produce good beets, carrots, 
parsnips, cabbages, lettuce and radishes.” Extensive land clearing had 
already driven out all large game animals, but there were abundant

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2 Goodrich, *Ridgefield in 1800*, p 5, 8-9
3 Goodrich, *Ridgefield in 1800*, p8
4 Goodrich, *Ridgefield in 1800*, p 10
5 Goodrich, *Ridgefield in 1800*, p 10
“partridges and quail,” as well as woodcocks — all game that Julian Weir would happily be hunting in the 1890s.⁶

The Ridgefield of 1800 was a community of farmers, a number of craftsmen, most of whom also farmed, and a handful of rural professional men. Its families strove for what they called a “competence” — enough farm and dairy produce to feed their families, with a marketable surplus that could be traded with their neighbors and the local store and tavern. Three to four hundred barrels of salt pork and beef were already being exported from the town, it was estimated, as well as thousands of pounds of butter “carried fresh to New York market” and a substantial quantity of cheese.⁷ Market connections with the city that was already becoming the American metropolis, established by the arduous travel of wagons and carts, were already strong; they had greatly expanded in the years since the American Revolution with the improvement of roads.

A half-century later, Reverend Goodrich’s son, S.G. Goodrich (the famed children’s author “Peter Parley”) returned home to write a corresponding account of “Ridgefield in 1855.” The younger Goodrich found many signs of prosperity in agricultural Ridgefield. In his father’s time, he said, “most of the farmers were in debt, and a large part of their lands were under mortgage; now not four farms in the place are thus encumbered.” Drunkenness, tavern haunting by farmers in the winter time had declined. Roads, houses, the treatment of the landscape had shown a “remarkable progress in wealth, taste and refinement.” He noted the process of architectural “improvement” in Ridgefield, that the “old houses are mostly gone” or “have undergone such mutations as hardly to be recognized,”

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⁶ Goodrich, Ridgefield in 1800, p 11
⁷ Goodrich, Ridgefield in 1800, p 11-12
and that "a certain neatness and elegance have succeeded to the plain
and primitive characteristics of other days."  

In the years between 1800 and 1855 Ridgefield's rural economy had been
transformed, and by the Civil War it had reached its noonday peak. The
ways of the marketplace had penetrated everywhere in the southern New
England countryside. Farmers were growing increasingly larger
proportions of their crops for sale and exchange with merchants; many of
their sons had turned to artisanal manufacturing while wives and
daughters often took up domestic outwork in their leisure time. Villages
like Ridgefield center and outlying neighborhoods like Branchville added
to their agricultural production a new economic role as numerous small
centers of artisanal manufacturing, of "rural production for urban
markets." Near mid-century, Ridgefield had scattered among its
neighborhoods 9 hat manufacturing shops, a saddle and harness
"factory," a carriage-making shop, two chair and cabinet manufacturers,
a tinware production shop, a sizable limekiln, three tanneries, and 31
households engaged in the production of shoes for urban and export
markets. In Ridgefield the increasing nearness of city markets (in terms
of travel time and cost with better roads and the opening of the railroad
branch in 1852) and the emergence of "home markets in every valley" as
the non-farming component of the rural population increased, had
"rous[ed] the taste, energy and ambition of the farmers within reach of
these pervading influences."  

The Beers farm on Branchville Hill may seem doubly obscure, occupying-
- a remote location in a small community. It received two lines in George

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8 S.G. Goodrich, "Ridgefield in 1855," p 183
9 Statistics of the Condition and Products of Certain Branches of Industry in Connecticut For the Year Ending
October 1, 1845 (Hartford: John L. Boswell State Printer, 1846) pp 105-106
10 S.G. Goodrich, "Ridgefield in 1855," p 199; for an overall account of this rural transformation in the North, see
Jack Larkin, "Rural Life in the North 1620-1980" Encyclopedia of American Social History (New York: Scribner's,
1992) vol. 2 p 1203-1234
Rockwell's massive *History of Ridgefield*, noting that its first owner Anthony Beers had been one of rural Connecticut's Episcopalian dissenters - and that 100 years later it had become J. Alden Weir's summer home. In reality, Anthony Beers began to clear his Branchville land around 1780 and built it into a successful and sizable upland farm in succeeding decades. Even the first house he built was not significant of humble "yeoman" status. Two story farm houses in the New England countryside, compared with the one-story and story-and-half dwellings of more modest folk, were statements of aspiration and prosperity. The renovation and restyling Lewis Beers undertook in the 1830s can be understood in terms of Ridgefield's overall social and economic transformation and was in fact emblematic of it. The Beers family adopted the most visible symbol of rural prosperity, the fashionable Greek Revival mode that was sweeping the villages and neighborhoods of New England as families built new or rebuilt. The adoption of the Greek Revival, the turning of the house's facade and its fashionable embellishment, were, for farm families particularly, a major attempt to become "genteel," to take on the graces of village and prosperous city life. Equally important was the adoption of paint (many farmers up to this time had not painted their houses) and the establishment of dooryards with picket fences and ornamental plantings to define symbolic, domestic space around the house. These were signs of a thriving economic life in rural neighborhoods.

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Farming in 1860 on the Beers Farm: A Reading of the Lewis Beers Inventory. ¹³

What we know about farming on this land during the immediate pre-Civil War period, the rural noonday, is contained in Lewis Beers' 1860 probate inventory. Beers left an extensive upland farm with about 180 acres of land—a figure that would likely have put him in the upper 15% of Ridgefield farmers in terms of acreage and value. ¹⁴ The farm had a complement of 8 cattle, of which four were milking cows, two were yearling calves, and two were heifers who would soon become milkers. Two pigs were being fattened on scraps and milk leavings. The inventory reveals an old horse and a fairly valuable one-year-old colt; there was an ox yoke, tackle and chains but no oxen were listed. This could not have been the farm's normal complement of draft animals. For serious work with the cart and ploughs, oxen were almost certainly used. ¹⁵ Oxen were in widespread use in 1860; there was almost one yoke of oxen in Fairfield county for every farm of over 20 acres. The farm's oxen may have been sold or slaughtered before his death; it is also possible that oxen, and perhaps a working horse could have been rented or exchanged for with a neighbor. Such exchanges were common in rural neighborhoods, and as Beers got on in years he may have found this the best arrangement.

There were only two examples of agricultural mechanization on the Beers farm: a corn sheller valued at $5.00, the most valuable implement, and a

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¹³ "Inventory of the Estate of Lewis Beers, late of Ridgefield, dec'd." March 14, 1861. Probate Court, District of Ridgefield (Connecticut) Volume 2A, Manuscript Records

¹⁴ Farms of over 150 acres were relatively rare in all settled southern New England towns from around 1800. See Larkin, "Rural Life in the North." The farm ownership pattern for Fairfield County as a whole can be seen in the figures of the agricultural census: Agriculture in the United States in 1860 Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) p 194

¹⁵ Leo Rogin, The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Productivity of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States During the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931), provides extensive descriptions of New England farmers' use of traditional wooden moldboard, cast iron, and steel plows: pp. 3-40
fanning mill valued at $3.00. Simple horserakes — horsedrawn wheeled devices which gathered the hay with revolving paddles — were significant innovations in 1830 but fairly common by 1860; however, Beers did not own one.\textsuperscript{16}

The inventory lists a few crops and stored foods; it was taken in March, not in at harvest time in November. There are substantial quantities of dried pole beans and several bushels of buckwheat; both were among the staples of Ridgefield agricultural production described by the Reverend Goodrich in 1800. Food for more immediate consumption was surely stored in the kitchen, whose contents were unfortunately not itemized; the contents of root cellars as well were rarely described in New England inventories of any period.

A “potatoe hoe” found in the inventory strongly suggests that the farm was growing potatoes in considerable quantities. Always grown in Ridgefield, they had become an increasingly important food crop in New England since the 1820s (although a worrisome potato blight, akin to the disastrous one in Ireland of 1846, had affected the crop for some years between 1849-52).\textsuperscript{17}

A “flour barrel” is testimony to the increasingly complete abandonment of the growing of bread grains by southern New England farms. It is very likely the container that the grain had come in, from a long distance away. Fairfield County grew little wheat. A diminishing number of farm families still made “Rye and Indian” bread, but by 1860 virtually all ate white bread from western flour as well. It is highly probable that the Beers family's

\textsuperscript{16} Robert L. Ardrey, \textit{American Agricultural Implements: A Review of Invention and Development}... (Chicago: published by the author, 1894) discusses and describes, with illustrations, hay rakes and mowing machines in Ch IX, pp 78-95
\textsuperscript{17} Russell, \textit{Long Deep Furrow}, p 412
flour came from the American “Wheat Belt” of the middle decades: western New York, Ohio, or Illinois.  

Beers’ plows, judging by their inventoried value, were probably cast-iron ones — the Ruggles and Nourse Eagle plow was New England’s most popular model at this time; the “old plow” was likely a traditional wooden moldboard plow shod with iron. The Eagle plow could have been drawn by horses but was widely used with oxen as well; the “old plow” would have used almost exclusively with oxen.

Dairying was at the center of the farm’s operations, as evidenced by the substantial number of cattle and the dairying equipment. The “tin ware pans and pails” found along with the “basement furniture” suggesting that some dairy work may have been done in this space. “Kitchen furniture,” like “basement furniture” was simply lumped together, and it is quite possible that churns, butter tubs, butter molds, perhaps even a cheese press and cheese tubs would have been found there or in the “basement.” Butter equipment was far more probable, as butter production had overshadowed cheese production in Fairfield County since the early nineteenth century; 10 pounds of cheese were produced for every one of butter in 1860.

Empty barrels and hogsheads were listed in the cellar. The long persistence of orcharding and cider making on the farm suggests that a number of them were cider barrels. It is likely as well that there would

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20 Agriculture in the United States in 1860 Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) p 15, 194; see charts, “Butter Production in Fairfield County,” and “Cheese Production in Fairfield County.”
have been a couple of meat barrels, where salted beef and pork were stored in heavy brine.

The Barn. English-style barns were traditional on New England farms until the 1820s. Many farmers—particularly those who extensively reshaped their dwelling houses in the 1820s and 1830s—rebuilt their barns by reorienting them in the same way—with the axis perpendicular to the road or path, rather than parallel. For most farmers this was more than simply stylistic, but reflected the calculation that the barn would be easier to enter with a team, could be driven through, and could be expanded in its axial direction without great difficulty if the number of cows and need for hay storage and stanchions increased. Thus most farmers in the period after 1820 built “New England” style when they built new. The English style barn does not indicate strictly retrograde practice on the part of the Beers family, but it accompanies the theme of moderate agricultural conservatism reflected in the probate inventory of 1860. Beers was clearly not a highly experimental, progressive farmer committed to acquiring a wide panoply of the latest tools—if he had been there would have been a horse rake and possibly a mowing machine among his possessions.

This combination of architectural comfort (the house reshaped in the Greek Revival mode) and agricultural conservatism (English barn, limited mechanization) actually established a pattern that in different ways both the Weir and the Young periods continued. JAW concentrated his “modernization” efforts on the house, content to leave the barn, with its traditional construction, as it was.

Lewis Beers Inventory 1860.

Analysis: Livestock, Implements and Equipment by Functional Category
Items marked with * are documented in the Visual Archive at the end of this report.
Vehicles

Top Wagon* and Pole 30.00
Sleigh* 25.00
Buffalo Robe and Blanket 3.00
Saddle and Bridle .50
Yoke and Irons* [Ox] 2.00
Old Harness
Sled*
Boat* [stone]
Cart* 5.00
Sled runners .25
Lumber Wagon* 5.00

Livestock

1 yr old colt 25.00
old horse 5.00

2 yearlings*
2yr old heifer*
3yr old heifer*
4 cows* - yellow, broken horned, white bag, wide horned

2 pigs

Soil Preparation and Cultivation

2 plows* 2.00
old plow* .30
harrow*
spade*.25
manure fork*.75

Harvesting

hayrakes*.25
brush scythe and snathe* 1.25
scythe and snathe* 1.00
fanning mill* 3.00
corn sheller* 5.00
2 pitchforks* 1.50
potatoe hoe*.37
Wood working
  bucksaw
  old saw 1.00
  3 axes 1.00

Stonework
  2 crowbars 1.00

Dairy
  tin ware pans and pails 5.00

General barn equipment
  grindstone 1.50
  2 brass kettles
  cutting knife .25

Crops
  buckwheat .75
  beans 1.00

Foodstuffs
  flour Barrel 1.50

Storage
  barrels and [Hogsheads?] in Cellar 5.00
  kegs .50
  baskets 1.50
  1 Old Tub in North Barn

Barn and Cow Houses
  Wash House etc.
  Hog House by House
  Wash Tubs .50

The Waning of Rural Tradition

After the Civil War, the economically vibrant rural world of Ridgefield and places like it, a world that had come into being early in the nineteenth
century, began to wane. Small-scale manufacturing left rural villages and neighborhoods, as industrial production became concentrated in much larger shops and factories in cities. Discussing the “Rural Neighborhood” in Connecticut, an observer noted in 1891 that “formerly there were many small manufactories in the country and many country mechanics; wagons, shoes, clothes, harness, and all the various articles were largely made in the country.” But with the loss of “the manufacturing element.. rural life has lost numerical strength.. the country blacksmith has closed his shop, moved his family to the city, and gone to work in the big factory there. The jobbing carpenter, who was so handy at building or repairing has followed his footsteps.” Accelerating their out-migration, farmers’ sons and daughters have “have sought employment elsewhere, and at something else.”

The agricultural community of Ridgefield to which J. Alden Weir came in 1883 was conscious of becoming a rural backwater in a way that would have seemed inconceivable thirty years earlier. There was still a demand for what farms could produce from ever growing urban markets, but competition was keen and profitability hard to find. The sense of rural community and of the centrality of rural life became attenuated, and farms were coming to seem more and more simply the appendages of the city. Many such farms after 1880 would be taken up either to those who did not need to sustain their household’s life on the farm’s returns, or would accept more marginal returns than Yankees would. Some were recent immigrant families who would accept hard work and limited returns to improve their lot. Others were metropolitan outsiders, with

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22 J.M. Hubbard, “The Rural Neighborhood,” Twenty-Fifth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1891 (Hartford, 1892)
23 J.M. Hubbard, “The Rural Neighborhood,” Twenty-Fifth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1891 (Hartford, 1892)
substantial sources of income and cultural/avocational interests in farm life and the look of the countryside.

Because of its closeness to the city and the beauty of its landscape, Ridgefield was a prime site for "colonization" by prosperous city families, with a substantial number of artists and writers desiring rural retreats. Demonstrating the power of the ideal of rural life when married by the railroad to the proximity of the metropolis, Ridgefield attracted other American artists, among them Frederick Remington, the landscape painter George Henry Smilley, and the designer and decorator Edwin H. Blashfield.

Thus there was a growing number of establishments that were what we might call "quasi-farms" in the economic sense; they were not intended to be primary productive units for the owner's economic support and survival. In the net, they represented a substantial infusion of money from "the city" into the town's economy — but also a great transformation. The coming of the Weirs and others like them testified to this. They loved their corner of the town but were not part of its fabric. They were in Branchville but not of it.

Railroad service to Branchville began in 1852 with the completion of the Danbury to Norwalk Railroad. Thus Branchville initially became a place with considerably better metropolitan connections than Ridgefield Center, and causing the building of a much better road between the center and the long-time peripheral district. By 1870 a branch line had been built to Ridgefield Center. This station may have become the primary access to the farm on Nod's Hill; the route was far more level, although

24 Rockwell, Ridgefield, pp. 438-439
considerably longer, than the steep climb and descent to the Branchville station.

Culture and Agriculture: “The apple trees are still in blossom so I was not too late.” 26

The accelerating discovery of country life in Connecticut by the well-to-do was noted by many late-19th century observers. In 1891, Florine Thayer McCray noted in an address to the Connecticut Board of Agriculture that “the busy merchants and financiers of our great cities go out of town with their families, earlier and earlier each year, and do not return until nearly the first of December.” It was, she felt, “a marvelous reaction for us Americans,” who had until recently been “inclined to leave the farms and to desert and depreciate home life in the country.” They were turning, she said, “from their busy lives and the rasping friction of the world to the cool, refreshing regenerative contact with natural things.”27 It was acknowledged that “Salubrious climate and picturesque scenery were now as much a part of the Connecticut countryside’s resources as were barns, livestock, and pastures, “which will continue to invite summer visitors.”28

Branchville was a farm in fact but also a farm of the imagination and emotions, a haven from the fast pace and crowding of Manhattan, worries about the art market, and the stresses of travel. Weir was taking a path that many well-to-do [he was highly prosperous by the standards of the great majority of Americans and certainly any working Ridgefield farmer, although he often felt poor] professional and mercantile men were taking

26 JAW to EBW, 5/9/13, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
28 "The Farm in its Relation to the Public Health," Twenty-second Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1888 (Hartford, 1889) pp 186-197
out of the city for part of the year. After their first stay at Branchville he and Anna felt a great reluctance to leave the farm. JAW wrote from New York in 1883 to his mother-in-law that “we are again in this big turmoil of a city, and already wish we were out of it.”29 In the spring, he would often note that “we are beginning to long for the old farm.”30 John’s wife May expressed the family’s shared sense of attachment to the farm’s cleared, pastoral landscape: “the beautiful fields under the far-reaching sky.”31 To experience the farm, as John Weir wrote to Julian, was to be “communing with the trees, the fowls, the stock...”32 Thirty years after he bought the place, Julian was returning with pleasure and satisfaction. “We found ... everything looking very well,” he wrote, “the flowers still blooming in the garden... I have had a walk over the farm to see the improvements”33. Over the years, the brothers loved “to walk over the fields” together.34

A Connecticut physician writing in 1883 would have saluted, on the grounds of health, the instinct that led Weir to Branchville. While he believed that the actualities of farm life for many Connecticut farmers who had to toil unstintingly for a living could lead to illness and early death, he was emphatic in emphasizing the benefits of a balanced, moderate involvement with farming work. “To pass the working hours of the day in the pure air and invigorating sunshine,” he wrote, living on a farm but achieving the balance of “suitable mental and physical exercise, "were the conditions for physical perfection.”35 Physically vigorous men, Julian and John Weir both enjoyed, in the 1880s and ‘90s at least, throwing themselves into farming work. Surely the best thing about it for

29 JAW to Ada Baker, 10/11/83 JAW papers AAA roll 125
30 JAW to EB, 5/3/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
31 Mary Weir to JAW, 9/1/92, JAW paper AAA roll 125
32 JFW to JAW 9/8/93, JAW papers AAA roll 125
33 JAW to Dorothy and Cora Weir, 10/19/13, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
34 JFW to JAW, 9/25/93, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
35 Dr. G. A. Bowen, “The Health of the Farmer and His Family,” Eighteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84 (Hartford, 1884) pp 131-146
them both was that they could do it only in the mornings if they wished to, or could leave for town; their livings did not hang in the balance.  

The gap of cultural incomprehension that existed between artistically trained urbanites and ordinary New England farm folk is strikingly illustrated in Francis Underwood's Quabbin: the Story of a Small Town with Outlooks on Puritan Life, published in 1893, which looks at the 19th-century transformation of a community not dissimilar to Ridgefield. A painter from New York City arrives in the community and finds that his profession, his way of looking at nature and the landscape, his tastes, and his religious beliefs involve him in a series of misunderstandings and cultural collisions. He looks at landscapes and prospects, while they see only woodlots and pastures. His devotion to art, his love for Shakespeare, and his broadly tolerant "liberal" Christianity are morally suspect to evangelicals living "in a dying world." His dress and vocabulary are seen as "outlandish." His prosperity and "gentlemanly manners" are both admired and resented. Ultimately, he marries a local girl (from the town's wealthiest and most cultivated family) and returns to New York City; Quabbin then becomes a place of summer retreat!

Life and Work on the Weir Farm: An Agricultural Perspective

J. Alden Weir's own marvelous paintings provide only a fragmentary and aesthetically refracted vision of farming and rural life. Weir was not a renderer of detailed, prosaic landscapes of daily life, so that we get only glancing, incidental details. Although he at times worked himself on the farm, and was surely intimately familiar with the tools, livestock, vehicles

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36 See, for example, JFW to JAW, 9/11/99, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
37 Francis Underwood, Quabbin: the Story of a Small Town with Outlooks on Puritan Life (Boston, 1893) pp 296-359
and crops, he wasn't thereby disposed to lavish pictorial attention on them.

The Farming Year. Farming at Branchville followed the centuries-old seasonal schedule of the New England farm, told off in almanacs, woodcuts and farmers' diaries. Winter was spent in woodcutting, chores and repairs. The early spring was given to the repair of posts and gates, the cleaning out of ditches. Ploughing and manuring the fields began in April for the fall crops, followed by harrowing, sowing seed, and harrowing again to cover the seed. Then followed in May and June the long routines of weeding and cultivation for garden crops, potatoes and corn, the harvesting of winter rye, the care of cattle on the pastures, and then the first haying in early July. The rest of the summer brought more cultivation, particularly of corn, a second haying in August, more cultivation, and a succession of harvest intervals in September, October and into November. In an unusually good year for grass there might be a "third bite" in September if warranted. The Weir family's usual tenure of May through November meant that they missed spring manuring and planting but remained through the far more picturesque seasons of haying and harvest.

To develop a more detailed account of life on the Branchville farm we must pull together several disparate sources: the numerous fragments of agricultural reference in the J. Alden Weir correspondence; the one existing listing of farm implements and livestock; the evidence in the Mahonri Young drawings for the post-1920 period; contextual information about crops, technology, livestock, and Connecticut rural life and economy, drawn from a variety of sources. Following the descriptive and analytical narrative based on these sources is a Visual Archive of New England farm implements, tools, vehicles and livestock.
Tools of Farming: the Inventory. The probate inventory of 1920, taken the spring after Weir's death, reflects in a summary way the agricultural practice of the 37 years since he had taken the farm in 1883. It is striking to note how remarkably the value of the paintings in the studio and in the house overbalances the total value of livestock and implements. The farm equipment and livestock inventory values were very modest, probably reflecting their relative "antiquity as conservative, traditional implements by 1920, and their low value in a more up-to-date market for agricultural technology. It is certainly possible that there were tools, perhaps even vehicles and livestock belonging to the tenant farmer at the time; we simply do not know.

J. Alden Weir Inventory of 1920
Analysis: Livestock, Implements and Equipment by Functional Category
- Items marked with * are documented in the Visual Archvye of Farm Implements at the end of the this report.

Livestock
- 5 Cows* 500
- Horse 25
- 27 Hens* 25
- Rooster * 1
- 3 Guinea hens 2

Vehicles and Harness — Transportation
- 3 two-seated station wagons*- 1 broken 20
- 2 whips .25
- horse harness 3
- collar and bridle 1

38 "Inventory of the Estate of Julian Alden Weir," May 12, 1920, Probate Court, District of Ridgefield (Connecticut)
39 George A. Martin, Farm Appliances. A Practical Manual (New York: G. Judd and Co., 1888) has abundant descriptions and illustrations of many of the common farm devices: cattle stanchions; carts; farm wagon; sleigh; roller; harrows; row markers; grindstone; wooden forks; hay hook; tools for stone work; well mechanism; hay stack frame; manure fork; manure hauling; scalding kettle
40 "Inventory of the Estate of Julian Alden Weir," May 12, 1920, Probate Court, District of Ridgefield (Connecticut)
horse blanket .50
2 heavy carriage rugs 2
2 light carriage rugs 1
old sleigh * 3

Vehicles and Harness -- Farm
2 farm wagons* 20
2 horse sleds* 5
farm harness 5
2 stone drags* 3
ox sled* 3
ox yoke* 1

Soil preparation and Cultivation Implements
one-horse marker* 1
two-horse roller* 5
2 one-horse cultivators* 2
“A” harrow* 2
2 plows* 5
smoothing harrow* 3
weeder 1
hand cultivator
4 spades* 2
2 spading forks* 1

Harvesting Implements
3 scythes* .25
6 rakes* 1.50
one-horse rake* 5
winnowing machine* 2
corn sheller* 3
feed cutter * 3

Dairy Equipment
2 three-legged (milking) stools .25
grain measures [for feeding] .50

Woodworking Tools
4 saws 2
auger .50
vise 1

Stoneworking Tools
2 picks 1
3 crowbars 3

General Barn Equipment
3 wheelbarrows* 3
gindstone* 1
ladder 1
4 pitchforks* 1
scalding kettle 5 (probably copper)
miscellaneous tools 2

Landscape and Lawn Tools
lawnmower 1
clippers .50
The agricultural components of the J. Alden Weir probate inventory for 1920 reflect the working of what by the standards of that year would have been a somewhat undercapitalized hill farm. The 5 cows, 23 chickens, 1 horse are a modest livestock component. The number of chickens reflects a minimum number discussed in poultry books as small or modest flocks, and about half of what has been estimated as typical for New England general farms. Five cows are enough to provide for the needs of a couple of ordinary sized households and leave a modest marketable or (in the neighborhood) exchangeable surplus. The single horse on the farm was valued at $25, considerably less than the average valuation — $40 — of the farm's cows. The horse was likely old, unlikely to have been much like the dashing “Diamond” of the 1890s; a good horse was worth at least $100.41

But although the inventory records only one horse, almost contemporary tax records list three — a number that makes much more sense in terms of a significant number of “two-horse” vehicles and implements.

Farm Transportation. Valued along with the horse was a variety of "farm" and "miscellaneous" ’harness — used to attach the horse to the farm wagons, the plows, marker, roller, harrow and hayrake, and sled. There were two "farm wagons" were somewhat larger, heavier version of the "station wagon" with open, seatless, wagon boxes. They were used for virtually every kind of farm hauling — harvested hay oats and corn, manure in planting season, milk cans, goods for exchange, probably heavier hauling of family goods from the station. They were matched by two "horse sleds" for use over snow and ice; these vehicles, judging by their valuation, were considerably more crudely made.

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41 William J. Jennison, “Fairfield County,” Fourteenth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81 (Hartford, 1881) pp 258-262
The Persistence of Oxen. New England farmers used oxen as their primary draft animals in preference to horses through the middle of the nineteenth century and continued to use them even into the 20th. Oxen were clearly in use on the Beers farm during the Beers occupancy and we can be sure, earlier. A beautifully rendered yoke of red working oxen is clearly visible in Weir's 1897 "Noonday Rest in New England" along with a two-wheeled ox cart. The 1920 inventory does not indicate oxen but the Ridgefield tax list for that year identifies a pair of them, the hiring of an ox-driving laborer is discussed in 1915, and evidence for their presence remains in vehicles and equipment. There is an "ox yoke" and an "ox sled" among the horse-drawn implements and vehicles. Oxen had always been favored in New England for their power and sure-footedness on rocky slopes; but they were slow, ponderous and did not move fast enough to operate "modern" agricultural machinery such as mowing machines and rakes. Julian Weir presumably liked oxen and enjoyed the way they worked on the farm; they did, after all, pull his mobile studio, the "Palace Car," around the farm. This is a remarkably traditionalist, even romantic farm practice, continuing thirty years after the Federal Agricultural Census had ceased even recording oxen on farms. Ox teaming was a tradition in decline, but it never was completely abandoned in New England and died out slowly in the country towns. In this respect, Weir's farming was far from the practice of the great majority of his "gentleman farmer" contemporaries, who normally wanted only the most "progressive" equipment and stock.

Plowing and Harrowing. The inventory listed two plows for turning the soil and preparing the seedbed for oats, corn, potatoes and garden crops. Their relatively low valuation suggests that they were far from new

and were certainly not the horse-drawn "riding" or "sulky" plows common in the Midwest where far larger acreages were in tillage, or on "high-style" progressive farms in New England. They were surely hand plows, somewhat streamlined steel versions of the traditional 18th-century 19th century New England plow; this is confirmed for the 1890's by the painting *Plowing for Buckwheat*, which shows oxen pulling a hand plough. The Weir farm continued even in 1920 to plow in the old-fashioned way its small tillage acres (it's unlikely that the Weir farm had more than 10 acres in potatoes and oats and corn).43

After plowing broke up the soil, it was further pulverized with a "harrow," a horse-drawn implement dragging spike-like teeth over the plowed ground to break up clods. Interestingly, the farm in 1920 still had the traditional "A harrow," a triangular frame set with rigid spike teeth; it was probably very similar to one listed in the Beers inventory; and was suitable for use by either oxen or horses. There were also two "one-horse cultivators" which could also be used in soil preparation; with steel "spring teeth" which responded to the unevenness of the ground and were less likely to break on rocky soil. The "smoothing harrow," intended to pulverize the soil more finely, was likely a steel disc harrow. The next step in soil preparation was the use of the "two horse roller," sometimes called a "clod-crusher," which broke up the largest clods of earth. Some farmers harrowed after using the roller as well, to better aerate the soil. The roller was essentially a steel drum mounted on an axle with a frame, riding seat and attachment. Stone drags listed in the inventory were used in the never-ending process of clearing the tillage and mowing land of stones – which continued to work their way up to the surface in cultivated land as part of the freeze-thaw cycle.44

43 See Rogin, *The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Productivity of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States During the Nineteenth Century*, for New England farmers and plows pp. 3-40
44 See Martin, *Farm Appliances. A Practical Manual* (New York: G. Judd and Co., 1888) for these devices
Haying. Hay was the farm's most important crop, as it had come to be on most New England farms since at least the middle of the nineteenth century. It was primarily important as winter feed for cattle and horses, a key ingredient of the dairy economy. Hay was a cash crop as well, sold to non-farming rural residents for their horses or milking cow, and sold in abundance to stables and wholesalers in the cities to keep the still horse-powered transportation system running; for local transportation, it was still the "gasoline" of the late nineteenth century.

"Foxtail or timothy" was the "leading grass for hay" in the towns around Ridgefield, along with "red top"— both were traditional form of English hay in New England — and "blue grass." Hay was almost always cut twice in early July and early to mid August, and it was claimed that it was "not unusual to mow three times during the season, and to get a good bite in the fall besides." In 1903 the farm made its second cut on August 15. Later, in 1915, the hay had been cut twice by the first week in August and Weir was asking for advice as to whether a third cutting as early as August 24 was advisable. Weir Farm might have grown twenty tons of hay a year on about as many acres — approximately 1 ton per acre remained the average yearly yield on good hay land. Good-sized New England farms like Weir's normally produced hay enough to carry the livestock through the winter and soled or exchanged a significant amount as well; the one reference to yields is from 1903, when the farm's hay crop was deficient, and Weir's farmer had to buy some during the winter.

45 William J. Jennison, "Fairfield County," *Fourteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture* 1880-81 (Hartford, 1881) pp 238-251
46 JAW to C Baker, 8/15/03, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
47 JAW to Dorothy Weir, 8/24/1915, JAW Papers, AAA roll 126
48 JFW to JAW, 7/2/04, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
Haying season was always a time of hurry and anxiety for New England farmers, striving to get the crop harvested and brought dry into the barn. It seems clear that Lewis Beers had accomplished his haying in the long-traditional way; the grass was mowed with scythes – arduous, athletic work, the most physically challenging of tasks on a New England farm. Then the windrows of cut hay were turned to dry and then raked up by men (and occasionally women if the task was urgent). Hay was then pitched up into a cart or wagon, carried into the barn and pitched into the hay mow. If there was no room in the haymow farmers stacked their hay, building a durable haystack. 49

How different from this picture was haying on the Weir Farm? There is no mowing machine listed on the farm inventory, and there appears to be no positive documentary evidence for its use on the farm. This would be as striking an instance of conservatism as the use of oxen, since mowing machines in Connecticut began to become generally known after 1860; by the mid-1880s it was maintained that the great majority of Connecticut farmers regarded them as indispensable: “As regards haying, who can get along without a mowing machine? Echo answer no one.”50 However it appears that the Weir Farm did so. A considerably later drawing by Mahonri Young is titled “Mowing at Weir Farm,” but in actuality it depicts the raking up of already mown hay. In the background a man rakes by hand while a one-horse "spring-tooth sulky hay rake" is at work in the foreground. A horse rake was part of the equipment of the farm listed in 1920, and appears to have been its one concession to the mechanization of harvesting that had swept over American agriculture.51 The horse rake

49 There are numerous accounts of traditional haying in New England; Larkin, The Reshaping of Everyday Life, pp 19-21 provides a summary description
50 Joseph Rood, “Connecticut Farming,” Twentieth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1886 (Hartford, 1886) pp 89-95
51 See Ardrey, American Agricultural Implements: A Review of Invention and Development, Ch IX, pp 78-95 ;R. Douglas Hurt, American Farm Tools: From Hand Power to Steam-Power (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982) provides extensive discussions and illustrations of mowing and harvesting
made a major difference in haying labor. “It took about three hours’ hard labor... to rake an acre of hay with the old fashioned hand rake,” remembered a veteran Connecticut farmer, but “... now it can be done ... in fifteen or twenty minutes.” A horse rake still survives on the Weir Farm, possibly the one mentioned in the 1920 inventory but more certainly connected to Young’s drawings. Still, it seems probable that the most laborious part of haying was still traditional and the three scythes in the barn were still in constant use.

Corn. Corn was the next crop in importance, the single most widely grown staple in America. A little sweet corn may have been grown in the garden, but in the farm’s fields hard “flint” corn was grown. In Beers’ time, and certainly earlier, some of the crop had been ground into meal for household use, baked into “Rye n Injun” bread or JohnnyCake. But by the 1880s virtually all Connecticut corn was being ground more coarsely for animal feed. The most common corn grown in the area was eight-rowed yellow flint corn “a good yielder, which has been in use here from time immemorial.” It had large, very hard kernels. Other varieties such as “Dutton, King Philip, yellow and white dent,” which varied in size and were some a little softer, were grown in Fairfield County as well.

Grown widely separated in rows, corn was the field crop that needed most intensive weeding during the growing season. Traditionally, New England farmers had cultivated the crop with intensive labor, undertaking for hand-hoeings for each plant every season. The two "one-horse cultivators" on the farm were successful attempts to mechanize the hoeing process that began to be widely adopted in the 1850s. Plow-like in implements and machines from the mid-19th to the early 20th century from a more modern scholarly perspective, pp 40-56

53 William J. Jennison, “Fairfield County,” Fourteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81 (Hartford, 1881) pp 238-251
their general construction, hand guided by a farmer who walked behind the implement, cultivators had spike teeth, spring teeth, or small "shovel" blades; they were drawn between the corn rows, killing weeds, stirring the soil, and helping to hill up the sprouting corn plants. A one-horse marker, a relatively simple contrivance made primarily of wood that could have been constructed right on the farm, was in use for spacing out and marking the rows for planting corn.54

The corn harvest in the field was essentially unmechanized. Ears were cut from the stalks, loaded into wagons and brought back to the barn. Old-fashioned practice allowed the stalks to stand in the field for cattle to graze on. More progressive farmers since the 1830s harvested the stalks as well for barn-fed fodder. Corn was normally cut from the stalk with corn knives; one is listed in the Beer inventory but missing in 1920, but no knives are mentioned in the inventory.

Corn was husked and shelled so that it could be ground into livestock feed. Husking had been partially mechanized for very large scale midwestern farms, but virtually all New England farms continued to husk by hand in the manner traditional for centuries. The next step, shelling, had traditionally been performed laboriously by rubbing each ear against the edge of a steel bar to remove the kernels from the cob or by flailing the ears on the threshing floor. The Weir farm, like the Beers farm had a "corn sheller." Its value clearly indicates that it was a hand-cranked device which removed the kernels by forcing each ear against a toothed cylinder; much larger models were horse-powered, but they were primarily used on large midwestern farms. Such machines had become widespread in New England after 1850. Normally one worker fed the ears

into the machine while another turned the crank. The kernels were dropped into a bucket and the cobs dropped away onto the barn floor.55

Small Grains. Oats and rye — the farm's (and Ridgefield's) principal "small grain" crops were grown on the farm in some measure throughout the Weir period, along with some buckwheat, although it is difficult to be specific about the quantities. Both rye and oats were perfectly good animal fodder, with oats particularly well suited to feeding horses. It is unlikely that any true bread grain was being raised; there was probably no "Rye and Indian" being made in Weir farm kitchens. Both crops still fit well into the traditional field rotation described in 1800 which local agriculture seems to have continued to follow. Painted during the 1890s, Weir's *Plowing for Buckwheat* tells us that buckwheat was also grown on the farm in some quantity, as it had been in the Beers years. It was a good carryover crop and its blossoms attracted bees for orchard pollination. It also made good poultry feed. As with hay, there is a frustrating lack of positive evidence about how these crops were harvested. Hand methods included "sickling," the most traditional (there are no sickles in either the 1860 or 1920 inventories) or "cradling," cutting the grain with a cradle scythe. Grain cradles, scythes with a lattice of wooden fingers to catch the grain, were customarily used for harvesting oats and buckwheat and were coming into use in New England in the grain harvest as in the 1830s.56 Horse-powered reapers — the key to America's late-19th century revolution in farm productivity — were available in Ridgefield and surrounding communities, although less common in New England than mowing machines. But although a Connecticut farmer reminded his readers in 1890 that "the modern reaper will cut four times as much grain as a man with a cradle ... and a farmer who has used one will never return

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56 Rogin, *Farm Machinery*, for a discussion pp 69-70
to the old cradle or sickle again,“57 there is simply no indication for their use. John Weir’s mention in 1904 that farm workers “cut the grain, but it has been too wet to bring it in,” might suggest hand labor but is ultimately inconclusive.58 The farm’s strong traditionalism in the matter of oxen and, probably, haying, may suggest that traditional harvest methods remained in use, and that the scythes were fitted with cradle teeth.

Oats and rye also had to be threshed — that is, the nutritious head removed from the stalk. The farm lacked a horsepowered threshing machine — they were fairly expensive and were primarily used on larger grain farms. The inventory shows a hand-cranked “winnowing machine” or “fanning mill” that cleaned the grain from dirt and inedible chaff after it had been threshed; a similar machine was present in 1860 on the Beers farm. A screen shook the grain while a wooden fan blew the lighter chaff away. It seems more probable then, that the traditional method - wooden flails vigorously wielded on the threshing floor with the grain then cleaned in the winnowing machine — was still in use, rather than the possible rental of a threshing machine from a more progressively equipped neighbor.59

Livestock . John Weir’s view of the farm’s livestock, not quite that of a practical farmer, combined pets and draft animals, the workday and the sentimental: he once wrote “in conclusion I will add that the cows, the horses, the pigs, the chickens, the turkeys, the dogs, the cats, the pigeons, the rabbits, the oxen all thrive.”60

57 William H. Brewer, "The Past and Future of Connecticut Agriculture," Twenty-fourth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1890 (Hartford, 1890) pp 153-175
58 JFW to JAW, 7/2/04, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
59 See Hurt, American Farm Tools, p 67-69 for threshing processes and implements, including fanning mills
60 JFW to JAW, 9/12/93, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
We can be sure that pigs and chickens were slaughtered on the farm for the family table; a “scalding kettle,” used in butchering of hogs, was included in the barn inventory. Meat was easy to obtain elsewhere, of course. It had been customary in the New England countryside for neighboring families to exchange meat, vegetables, dairy products, labor and the use of animals. But while this practice was attenuating, there were stores in Ridgefield Center, Branchville and a whole world of commerce in foodstuffs available in South Norwalk.

Cattle. Late-nineteenth century Ridgefield was a hay and dairy town, its cattle considerably outnumbering its people. Most of the town’s cattle were still the traditional reddish “properly native” breeds with some Devon ancestry; working oxen were virtually always Devons. The Weir Farm’s oxen were almost certainly Devons but their dairy cattle seem generally to have been of more specialized and progressive breeds. Sending up two Alderney cows – a much admired and relatively expensive breed – to Branchville was one of Julian’s first actions as a farm owner. First introduced in any numbers around 1846, by 1880 in Fairfield County they were particularly famed for the high butterfat content of their milk and “coming into general favor as a butter-producing cow,” particularly among “gentlemen farmers.” The new couple also received a Jersey cow as a wedding present; unfortunately it died later in the year.

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61 William J. Jennison, “Fairfield County,” Fourteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81 (Hartford, 1881) pp 238-251
62 JAW to ADB, 10/22/82, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
63 See Russell, Long Deep Furrow, pp. 300-311
65 ABW to EB, 6/6/83, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
The three English Channel Islands—Alderney, Jersey, and Guernsey—had long specialized in dairy farming, and each had produced similar, although not identical (given their island separation) breeds of high-yielding cattle. All three breeds had been experimented with by progressively inclined dairy farmers in New England and New York by the late 1850s. Alderneys and Jerseys were thought by many practical farmers to be "wholly unsuited to the wants of the practical farmer... however desirable the cows may be on the lawn or in the gentleman's park." They were widely acknowledged as beautiful animals whose milk was of the highest taste and quality, but most other breeds produced substantially larger quantities of milk. Jerseys were another Channel Island breed, also renowned as "butter cows."

The problems of livestock management sometimes concerned JAW. In 1884 he traveled up to Branchville on a weekend in February to deal with a sick cow and a dead calf. Later that year in October he and Anna traveled to the famed Danbury Fair, the largest agricultural exposition in Connecticut, particularly to view the cattle. Anna wrote that they greatly admired the "Holstein cows, which were beauties, Julian and I quite longing to get some." The Holstein breed, originally Dutch, was becoming one of the predominant dairy breeds in America at that time; Holsteins were specially prized for their vigor, hardihood, and ability to turn feed into large quantities of milk. Unfortunately, we don't know

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67 Flint, *Milch Cows* pp 26-28
68 see Russell, *Long Deep Furrow*, pp 300-311
69 JAW to EB, 2/12/84, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
70 ABW to EB, 10/10/84, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
71 see Russell, *Long Deep Furrow*, pp 300-311
whether Holsteins, with their distinctive black and white coloration, ever came to Branchville.

It seems clear that there were always several cows on the farm; Lewis Beers had owned eight of various ages in 1860; the inventory of 1920 inventory listed five. But how was the milk they produced used? A good deal of the whole milk and butter [Fairfield County had almost completely ceased the production of cheese by the 1880s] produced at Branchville went to feed its households — the Weir clan and their guests, the farmer and his family. "We are now expecting the arrival of another cow," wrote JAW to his [then] sister-in-law Ella, "so you see we will be in good condition to receive you." Could some of it have been marketed? Surely it is possible, but undocumented. Branchville Depot or Ridgefield Center Depot, with their connections to the markets of South Norwalk and New York City, were both relatively short wagon rides away. Revealing farm- and neighborhood-level statistics cannot be obtained, but it seems clear that this increased propinquity to the city would have been a major incentive for milk production on farms not far from Branchville station. A two-hour trip on the "cars" from the ever-hungry and thirsty city of New York meant practical proximity to the greatest concentration of milk consumers in the United States.

With the exception of the two three-legged stools in the Cow and Hay Barn, dairy equipment was nonexistent in the 1920 inventory, suggesting that it may have all been in the hands of the tenant family and possibly undertaken in their household, perhaps in a room or shed attached to their house. Otherwise we would expect to see milkpans, pails, dippers, and milkcans along with the cows, stools and grain measures. Strikingly, the inventory does not include the kitchen.

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93 JAW to EB, 8/13/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
Pigs. On New England farms, pigs were virtually always fed on the dairy's "refuse of whey, butter-milk or skim milk," which were the leavings of butter and cheese making operations. "Dairy-fed pork," noted a widely used farming manual, "is distinguished for its fineness and delicacy; and the dairy refuse, in connection with grains, potatoes and scraps, is highly nutritious and fattening." With 4 to 8 cows being milked, the probable range for the farm, fattening two to 4 pigs would not have been too difficult, as long as the farm was making butter. Whole milk production for the milkshed would have significantly reduced the farm's capacity to carry pigs by greatly decreasing the "refuse." By the late nineteenth century, Suffolk, Poland, China and Berkshire pigs were commonly raised on New England farms.73 With current evidence, determining the breeds raised at Branchville does not seem feasible. The sizable pig enclosures identified on the farm landscape would have been more than adequate. Stone pig pens were quite rare on New England farms; the vast majority were constructions of boards. If these were pig pens, they were monumental ones.

Poultry. Chickens pecking in the yard are clearly evident in Weir's "Midday" of 1891; John's wife Mary noted with delight in 1892 that "Paul brought in his hat filled with 12 beautiful little chickens just out, and since then three more have peeped out to the light."74 There were always chickens and ducks on the farm: Julian and Anna enjoyed picking them out from neighboring farms in their earliest years.75 The 1920 inventory mentions two Guinea fowl, a decorative breed of pheasant-sized birds originally from West Africa; with that exception, we the farm in 1920, we do not know their breeds. By the 1880s New England farmers were giving

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73 Flint, Milch Cows, pp 361-363
74 Mary Weir to JAW, 9/1/92, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
75 ABW to EB, 10/10/84, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
up the dingy, motley “dunghill fowl” that had been their unspecialized native fowl for generations to raise a wide diversity of specialized breeds. Poultry manuals abounded, with advice on selection, breeding, feeding and the construction of chicken houses. Weir Farm’s chicken house was unlikely to have been as elegant as the poultry palace of Queen Victoria often illustrated in the manuals, but there are plans and illustrations for inexpensive housing for small flocks.76

Labor on the Farm. Weir’s “Noonday Rest in New England” (1897) shows two men taking a break in a Branchville field, with evidence of woods work and hauling all around them. Who worked on the Branchville farm? For a few 19th-century New England farms we have extensive accounts that allow us to reconstruct the yearly, seasonal and casual labor force for seventy or eighty years. For the Weir farm we have largely fragmentary references. The business and household accounts, whether kept by JAW or the succession of hired farmers, have, like most of these records, simply not survived. Clearly the farm sometimes used casual labor in haying or in harvest season.77 The bulk of the year’s work was done by the “farmer” and his family who, on a verbal or written yearly contracts, lived in the/tenant house. There are references to a total of some 17 different farmers and occasional workers in the Weir correspondence over a 37-year period; of these only 4 are named. Starting off in the 1880s, there were the ups and downs with workers’ quality and stability that are familiar to any student of New England farm labor. It seems clear that their services were not always completely satisfactory; a man named Holsten (possibly the “Dutchman” referred to elsewhere) was let go for letting 500 head of celery freeze in March (an expensive error, as it was a valuable market crop). Weir was delighted

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76 See, for example, Burnham’s New Poultry Book, a Practical Work on Selecting, Housing and Breeding Domestic Fowls (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1877) for advice, plans of poultry houses, and descriptions and illustrations of the various breeds.

77 JAW to JFW, 6/24/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125 refers to “a man who had occasionally worked for us.”
with his next farmer and family in 1888, who were "far the best we have ever had." But this was short-lived, as they departed the next year and he had to change again.

But it was in the nature of most farm help in New England not to stay long. Few Yankees were willing to work as laborers in these years, and relatively few to work as tenants. "Within half a century," noted an observer of rural Connecticut in 1883, "there has been a growing distaste for the cultivation of the soil," and, he thought "a steady depreciation in the quality of New England farm labor." Near the great city and hard by urbanizing coastal Connecticut, Branchville could reach out for foreign labor, since it appears that at this time there were few local Ridgefield men available who would do this work. Thus there was a "Dutchman," the Weirs' "thrifty, tidy" Scottish emigrants in 1888, and then Paul Remy, an Alsatian, and his family.

Paul Remy's work years (1890[?] to 1907[?]) are the best documented in the farm's history, but the evidence is still fragmentary; to a considerable extent it consists of reports to Julian from his brother John. [Many of these reports date from the summer of 1892 when Julian, grieving Anna's death, was avoiding Branchville; John clearly wished both to keep him informed and to get him re-involved with life.]

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78 JAW to JFW, 7/88, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
79 JAW to JFW, 4/14/89, JAW Papers, AAA roll 125
81 L. P. Chamberlain, "Farm Labor in New England," *Seventeenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84* (Hartford, 1884) pp 96-110
82 Benjamin Sedgwick, "Location As Controlling Farm Specialties" *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1894* (Hartford, 1895) pp 263-265; "... immigrant s can be hired from New York that can dig, hoe and do ordinary work at prices that make it possible to get a fair return from their labor"; L. P. Chamberlain, "Farm Labor in New England," *Seventeenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84* (Hartford, 1884) pp 96-110
Paul, from all accounts, was a hard worker" — "always at work," John noted. He was apparently a skilled traditional plowman, working with the farm's "two mighty oxen, who upturn huge boulders in the furrow." It was noted at various times that he brought in the hay, made haystacks in early August, cut oats, cleared a field for sowing winter rye, and dealt with wet corn overheating in the barn from spontaneous combustion. Apparently he at times corresponded with JAW about the work of the farm; of course, these missing letters would greatly have illuminated the details of farm operations. In 1893 it was noted that Paul was working "in the field with Webb," Weir's neighbor whose farm Weir would eventually buy. This strongly suggests that some form of cooperative work arrangement was already in place. There are numerous references to Paul's responsibility for the horses; presumably these extended to the other livestock as well.

John Weir's only critical comment about Paul was that he concentrated too intensely on working "out in the field." With his eye for domesticated order, John suggested to Julian that Paul be asked to spend more time on refinements: "work about the house — the chicken yard — make a house for the ducks and turkeys, the palings and such things." Julian appears to have been genuinely fond of Paul, once noting his illness with concern and extending his stay on the farm an extra day. John was respectful of Paul's skills and tried to "see that his regular work is not interrupted. This tells you all there is to say about the farm."
Paul’s wages for 1892 were $30/month, presumably in addition to his house and produce of the farm for his family’s food. This was significantly higher than the $20/month estimated for farm laborers in Fairfield County in 1881 (there was little wage movement in the decade) or the same figure that was given the “Old West Pointer” in 1886. Presumably the figure reflected Paul’s greater level of skill and responsibility, and Weir’s desire to keep him on. The correspondence indicates that the Weirs had a level of affection, concern and respect for Paul Remy far greater than for any other worker on the farm, before or since.

Paul’s son Willie was working alongside his father by 1903. He “keeps the gardens and the grounds in good order. He is a good worker — at it from morning till night — It looks as if Willie would eventually fill Paul’s place here,” thought John, but after 1907 the Remys were gone from the Farm without explanation in the currently available letters. Later accounts of labor refer to dissatisfaction with workers (“bouncing” an unsatisfactory man, or criticizing a “lazy” one) satisfaction (“a good man” or “two good men”) or to the special skill of ox driving which the farm still needed but was becoming increasingly rare. In the spring of 1917, Weir believed that he had secured “two good men for Branchville” and was “at peace on that question.” Unfortunately, by the fall he evaluated them as “not very competent,” and was paying a one-legged occasional laborer the sum of $3/day, reflecting the wartime shortage of labor. A year later the competition for farm labor was even more acute; “one of our men gave

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93 JFW to JAW, 10/9/92, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
94 William J. Jennison, “Fairfield County,” Fourteenth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81 (Hartford, 1881) pp 258-262. Wages .. $15 to $20 per month and board... daily wages for men without board, from $1.25 to $1.75 per day in the summer season.”
95 JAW TO JFW, 7/88, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
96 JFW to JAW, 8/11/03, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
97 JAW to EBW 5/19/13;6/21/16;7/22/16; JAW to JFW 12/1916;spring 1917; JAW to CES Wood, 11/4/18, 6/18, 12/2/18, JAW Papers roll 126
me notice yesterday that he had been offered $4.25 per day and could not afford to stay any longer on the farm." In general, in the years after 1900 Weir was more often than not concerned both about the competence of his resident farmers and the possibility that they might “clear out.”

One crucial component of the labor equation that hardly came into the discussion at all was the role of the most important working woman on the farm, the farmer’s wife. There is one reference in the correspondence to the wife of the short-staying farmer the “old West Pointer,” a woman who would “make butter and help with the washing,” in 1885. We are reminded by a rural Connecticut doctor writing at this time that it was she and her successors who “does ... the cooking, the washing and mending, makes many of her husband's garments and all of her own, and those of the children as they successively appear, attends to the dairy, feeds the pigs and poultry, and lugs in wood and water for household purposes.” Of the farm wife’s work on Weir Farm we have few traces, knowing nothing, for example, about Paul Remy’s wife and her labors; we only know that they were essential. [Is she the young woman portrayed in Weir’s *Alsation Girl* from the 1890-99 period?]

Domestic Labor. Julian Weir worried about money and often felt hard-pressed, but he maintained a comfortably prosperous late Victorian professional man’s household. Consequently his family had domestic help, both in the city and on the farm. Anna referred to “the two girls I have” at Branchville during her first year there. Crises over “help” seem to have been as common at Branchville as in most such Victorian households. In 1886 a cook had to be replaced because rural temptation

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97 JAW to CES Wood, 12/2/1918, JAW Papers, AAA roll 126
98 JAW to JFW, 3/22/85, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
99 Dr. G. A. Bowen, “The Health of the Farmer and His Family,” *Eighteenth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84* (Hartford, 1884) pp 131-146
100 ABW to EB, 8/6/83, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
was too much for her: she “took to cider like a duck to water,” with JAW making recruiting trips into the city. 101 He then brought out additional help, ”an extra housemaid and a fourteen year old boy, who ought to make things go somewhat smoother.”102 There are a couple of early references to cooking by Anna Weir, but cooks and ”waitresses” seem normally to have been part of the household when the family was in residence.

John and Mary Weir recruited help for the household during their stays as well; in 1892 he noted that he had “brought back” [most likely from New Haven] a new waitress,” or serving maid, “as our old one had to leave on account of her sister’s illness.”103 This pattern persisted into later years. In 1912, as JAW prepared to leave Branchville after his Thanksgiving visit, he noted that “the first relay with the servants leave tomorrow on the 10 A.M.train.”104

Farm Economics . Julian and John Weir discussed in their correspondence the importance of getting the farm “in such running order that it supports itself.” 105 It seems to have been taken for granted at the time that Weir consistently strove to make the farm return some income — or at least to reduce the burden upon his artistic income and investments from its maintenance as a summer residence. But precisely how he sought to do this is a bit unclear. Julian was clearly calculating that the farm’s produce would help him sustain his purchase when he noted at harvest time in 1883 “sixty bushels of potatoes and barn full of

101 JAW TO EB, 7/14/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125 “I went to the city last week for a new oook, the one which we were to pay $17, turned out to be such a bad character, but who always refused cider at her dinner so that no one every believed she took it , but the fact that she wanted the priest and the doctor two or three times in the course of the week.”
102 JAW to EB, 6/24/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
103 JFW to JAW, 9/8/93, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
104 JAW to CES Wood, 12/1/12, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
105 JFW to JAW, 8/2/83, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
grain etc.” so far so good,” or noting that “the garden is full of vegetables and the fields are heavy with grass and grains so this bagatelle of lucre has not the weight of former years.” But how, precisely?

Potatoes (about a half-acre’s worth given Fairfield Count estimates) could be marketed, grain and hay could be sold, or fed to cows to be turned into butter and milk, which could be sold. They could also have been eaten by the farm’s household. We don’t currently have the evidence to make reasonable estimates of how these uses might have been apportioned. It seems very likely, for example, that Julian was counting on the marketable value of the 500 heads of celery that were lost in a March frost; small fruits and vegetables, when “sent to New York,” were marketed through commission dealers who worked with local farmers. Milk and butter could be sold to creameries or to city-bound wholesalers who would deliver it to the New York market; hay was saleable as well.

Little information is available about the economic management of the farm. When Julian was away and John was at Branchville, John acted as fiscal agent for his brother and most of our clues to economic matters are in his letters. Paul Remy seems to have arranged for the payment of farm property taxes. Unlike the rural economy of earlier years that depended on long-term local exchange relationships of goods, services and labor, the Weir Farm economy seems to have been primarily one of

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106 JAW to Mrs. Baker, 10/21/83, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
107 JAW TO EB, 7/14/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
108 William J. Jennison, “Fairfield County,” *Fourteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81* (Hartford, 1881) pp 258-262
109 JFW to JAW 9/20/92, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
105 JFW to JFW, 7/88, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
cash exchange. John was concerned in 1893 to ensure that he got the farm’s “lines of supplies all established.”

The true economics of the Weir farm were driven by art and the aspirations and household needs of cultivated late Victorian urban Americans, not agriculture. Julian Weir and his brother John were, after all, not farmers who gave their spare time to art, but artist who found enjoyment, contemplation, a paintable landscape, and some exercise on the farm.

Horses and Travel. There clearly were a sizable number of horses at the farm over the years, but the only one about which we have much information is the redoubtable Diamond, who clearly was a family favorite. Weir noted in 1886 that the family now had a new carriage: “a new turnout this year in the shape of a side-bar Surry” — a stylish two-seated wagon with a covered top. Its lighter weight made it he thought, easier for the horse to negotiate Branchville’s and Ridgefield’s difficult hills. Diamond was fond of sugar and of the farm’s oats, and there was an extensive correspondence about his spell of lameness in September of 1893. It was noted that “Diamond has not been out since you left; he will be laid up for some weeks yet. Paul took him down to the blacksmith one day and he was very lame so we are reduced to Kitty, of whom we take great care, as usual.” Kitty is likely to have been either a young colt or an old horse. Diamond’s quick recovery — “Paul drove Diamond to Georgetown this morning and says he seems recovered, only limping a little” — left all parties concerned relieved; finding Kitty unsatisfactory, they had been looking for a horse to rent from a neighbor.
Childe Hassam’s stunning *The Road to the Land of Nod* (1910) may slightly exaggerate the steepness of the Branchville landscape, but not by much. The ride between the farm and either the Branchville station or the Ridgefield Center one, where rural peace was sometimes interrupted by “fast driving,” “shouting” and “the railroad whistle” to the farm, though not particularly long, was not an entirely comfortable one. Weir noted that the hills were difficult for his horse Diamond. Speaking of “Connecticut country roads,” a generally sympathetic observer noted that “one cannot truthfully say that it is a privilege to ride over them. What with the long weeks of mud in the spring, and the interminable season of dust and sand in a dry summer, the wrenching roughness of the frozen ruts of early winter, and the slushy dangers of a January thaw, it is really nothing less than martyrdom.”

There were three 2-seated “station wagons” on the farm in 1920, one of which was in poor condition. One might have been the earlier “surry” with a change in nomenclature. These carriages’ primary use in pre-automobile days was to bring family and guests back and forth from the Branchville station; the term appeared in the later nineteenth century to reflect this “commuter” reality. One of these vehicles may be pictured in a photograph taken of the “Boston Art Club” pond at Weir Farm taken some time after 1896. The inventory lists whips stored alongside them for driving, along with a collar and bridle for the horse while pulling the station wagon, a horse blanket for the animal in unusually cold weather, and two pairs of carriage rugs, “light” and “heavy,” for keeping the driver and passengers warm while riding in one of these open vehicles. There

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115 G. Goodrich, “Ridgefield in 1855,” p 184
117 The photograph is reproduced in Hildegard Cummings, “Home is the Starting Place: J. Alden Weir and the Spirit of Place” in *J. Alden Weir A Place of His Own* (Storrs, CT.: The William Benton Museum of Art, 1991) p 35, fig. 7
was also an "old sleigh" for winter driving, valued at considerably less than the passenger wagons.

**Fields on the Farmstead.** In general, with exceptions determined by major differences in soil types, or the farming of two or more distinct parcels, gardens and tillage fields on New England farms clustered relatively close to the farmstead, with hay fields next, permanent pastures after that, and most farm woodlands at the greatest distance. Crop rotation practices meant that no crop would find a permanent location; the farm’s alternations of oats, winter rye, corn and grass, with at times intervals of fallow for pasture, ensured that precise field uses would change significantly every year. Most farmers probably kept their large farm gardens in the same spot so as to be able to fence it and constantly manure it, although some farm writers suggested that its location be moved as well.

**The Farm Garden.** The garden was of course a fixture on the farm, and there are numerous references to it “looking finely” or “having plenty of vegetables.” But details are not abundant in correspondence that took its productions for granted. Lima beans, tomatoes and sweet peas were noted as particularly abundant in 1895. It may be reasonable to assume that the Branchville farm had what a Connecticut horticultural writer called “a real farm garden” of substantial size, plowed early in April, carefully tended with a hand cultivator (there was one listed in the 1920 inventory, a "weeder," a hoe-like hand tool for close cultivation and work in the garden either with a solid hoe blade or prongs) and “dressed with manure,” producing “early peas... onions ... radishes ... sweet corn... lima beans ... asparagus,” in addition to “early lettuce... beans and

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118 JAW to EB, 6/24/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
119 JAW TO EB, 7/14/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
120 JAW to EBW, 8/14/95, JAW to EB, 5/3/86, JAW to EB, 8/24/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
summer squashes... cucumbers,"121 and celery. It may well be that the Weir family followed the advice of the author of "The Farm Garden" that it made economic as well as culinary sense to draw as largely as possible on the "peas, beets, green corn, radishes, and other things from the garden to fill up" the farm's workers and members of the household.122 The garden may also have been at least at time a source of income or exchange.

The Farm Landscape. Connecticut farmers had significantly improved their landscape since the eighteenth century, but to the fastidious taste of the late-19th-century upper middle class, ordinary farm landscapes still often left much to be desired. As they took their long drives in the countryside, they saw many farms where "implements of husbandry" were scattered at random along the roadsides, beside the wall or fences, or around the buildings." They might see "a fruit tree ... decorated with old scythes, rakes, hoes, chains, hoops, harnesses, or horse shoes." Alongside them would be "Dilapidated chicken coops, discarded furniture, old barrels and boxes ... rubbish of all kinds, stumps, logs, old lumber, brush ..."123

Once in the country, they made different choices. There was an emerging class of farm residents in Fairfield County, wrote a close observer of its rural life in 1881, who "reside a part of the time in the city, and use their means freely in beautifying their places, caring not so much for profit on their outlay as to gratify their taste."124 Weir's means were not enormous,

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121 R. S. Hinman, "The Farm Garden," Thirty-third Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1899 (Hartford, 1900) pp 290-300
122 R. S. Hinman, "The Farm Garden," Thirty-third Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1899 (Hartford, 1900) pp 290-300
123 James Draper, "Our Home Ground and Our Roadsides..." Twenty-ninth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1895 (Hartford, 1896) pp 50-63
124 William J. Jennison, "Fairfield County," Fourteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81 (Hartford, 1881) pp 258-262
JAW Papers AAA roll 125
and his vision of rural life was not ostentatious and grand, but rustic and pastoral; but it was intent on controlling and ordering the materials of the agricultural landscape. He had removed the formal picket fence around the dooryard because it was a rural expression of yearning toward urbanity. He replaced it with rough palings that were an urbanite’s aspiration to rusticity. Weir, like the other new rural inhabitants of Connecticut would “plant ornamental trees ... something in the way of pleasure grounds for the children... a tennis court or croquet ground...”125 Too many Connecticut farmers, maintained a well-to-do gentleman agriculturist, lacked “that taste which is offended at the sight of a fallen fencepost, an unhinged gate, or a loose clapboard. To be artistic is to be truly economical.”126 Julian Weir would surely have agreed.

Landscape: Stone Walls. It is likely that many of the original stone walls on the farm were built fairly quickly as its fields were cleared, and were substantially in place by the 1820s. Weir’s painting *Upland Pasture* (1905) reveals the bones of Branchville’s landscape with its boulders and outcroppings of ledge. “The town was originally blessed, or cursed, as the case may be, by a most abundant crop of stones,” noted Samuel Goodrich the younger in 1855.127 His father observed that by 1800 “the post fences have been gradually replaced with stone and at present there is very little timber cut for that purpose except for posts and bars, and there is probably moveable stone enough for the purpose of fencing.”128 The stone walls had greatly improved since 1820, S.G. Goodrich observed in 1855: “In our day these were rudely piled up with frequent

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125 James Draper, “Our Home Ground and Our Roadsides...” Twenty-ninth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1895 (Hartford, 1896) pp 50-63
126 L. P. Chamberlain, “Farm Labor in New England,” Seventeenth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84 (Hartford, 1884) pp 96-110
127 S.G. Goodrich to C.A. Goodrich, 8/20/1855, published in Daniel W. Teller, The History of Ridgefield, Conn. (Danbury, CT: T. Donovan, 1878.) p180-201
128 Goodrich, Ridgefield in 1800, p 10
breaches – the tempting openings for vagrant sheep, and loose, yearling cattle. But at mid-century “most of these have been relaid with something of the art and nicety of mason-work.” Ridgefield’s rural neighborhoods boasted “sturdy walls, neatly laid, giving to the entire landscape an aspect not only of comfort but of refinement.” Of course, these generalizations would have applied far more extensively to walls by the roadside and around farm enclosures than to those separating interior fields in the “back lots,” which would have remained linear stone dumps.

Most of the Weir Farm landscape had long been cleared by 1883, but the correspondence does discuss the heavy labor of clearing one field: “the $25 lot,” which Paul Remy and John Weir cleared, spending days “getting out the rocks” and dragging them off with the oxen. John was proud of his strenuous participation in the farm’s work.

Interestingly, the “wire fences,” probably of the post-1920 later days on the farm were beginning to be introduced into Fairfield County in the 1890s, although not without controversy among agricultural opinion makers. They “may be used to very great advantage in certain places,” noted one exponent; they were “perfect for cattle.” His claim was countered by others who thought them unsightly and dangerous.

Landscape: Farmstead and Dooryard. The traditional “grouping and arrangement of outbuildings” on Connecticut farms had come under strong criticism by late-nineteenth century physicians and public health specialists. They lamented the farmstead so organized that “the barn with

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129 S.G. Goodrich to C.A. Goodrich, 8/20/1855, published as “Ridgefield in 1855” in Daniel W. Teller, The History of Ridgefield, Conn. (Danbury, CT: T. Donovan, 1878.) pp 180-201
130 JFW to JAW, 9/11/99, JAW Papers, AAA roll 125
131 P.M. Augur, quoted in Hubbard, “Fences and Fence Materials”, Twenty-Fifth Annual Report ... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1891 (Hartford, 1892) p 27
its cattle yard, the pig-pen and poultry house, the privy and the well, all seem to be striving to show the most sociability for the kitchen door, filling the air with foul odors, and the soil with filth and fever germs, to be carried into the well with every permeating rain."132 The Weir Farm, whether by happenstance or original design on the part of its first builders, and surely through the active concern of its post 1883 occupants, did better in this regard than the typical farmstead. Barnyard and dooryard were fairly well separated. The barn was for the most part, "far enough away from the dwelling house to prevent all annoyance from offensive odors."133 JAW liked "thrift, tidy" people and John Weir's letters to his brother suggest a strong shared concern for order on the farmstead: "the place is kept in order, and all is clean and tidy," he wrote in 1892.134 Paul's son Willie was praised for keeping "the gardens and the grounds in good order."135

That most necessary and least-discussed of buildings, the privy, remains a mystery on the farm. There was surely one on the Beers farmstead, but no evidence seems to have survived about its location. Even in the 1880s Connecticut farmers were still being criticized for so often locating it "in the corner of the yard or garden, in full view of passers-by on the highway, and the "men-folks" at the barn."136 The early addition of plumbing to the main house in Branchville appears to have brought upper-middle class urban standards to the farm in this respect — a significant "rural improvement " and addition of gentility.137

132 Dr. G. A. Bowen, "The Health of the Farmer and His Family," Eighteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84(Hartford, 1884) pp 131-146
133 Francis Gillette, "Hints on Rural Architecture," Ninth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1875-76(Hartford, 1876) pp 80-98
134 JFW to JAW, 9/21/92, JAW Papers, AAA roll 125
135 JFW to JAW, 8/11/03, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
136 Dr. G. A. Bowen, "The Health of the Farmer and His Family," Eighteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1883-84(Hartford, 1884) pp 131-146
137 JAW to Mrs. Baker, 1/8/87, JAW Papers AAA reel 125. This is discussed in the "Weir Farm Historic Structures Report," vol. 1, pp 64, 78
Ever attentive to the niceties of the dooryard, John worked hard on the farmhouse lawn; he tried to "make the grass grow as it should, but find it difficult." in 1891, and the next year noted that he had worked on the "mowing machine" (actually a familiar push or manual lawnmower with rotary cutting blades powered by the motion of its wheels) "took it all apart, and having got it to work have your lawn in fine shape." His wife Mary wrote that "already John has been out cutting the grass with the lawn mower until the lawn looks like velvet. Here he comes all in a"muck of sweat" and goes up for another sponge bath ..." John worked as well on the dooryard's drainage: "I have been fixing the road in front of the house, to drain it properly -- now there will be no bad places when it rains down near the gate and the barn."

"The Luxuries of Life": Food and Drink on the Farm. "They want the luxuries of life, -- the finest butter, the purest cream, the richest milk, the freshest and nicest vegetables, fruits and flowers," said an observer of the "new" farm families that were colonizing southwestern Connecticut. And surely the Weirs wished to eat a more varied and sophisticated diet than their predecessors on the farm ever had. Since we lack bills of fare, most of what the farm supplied the family table will simply have to be inferred. There was pork: in May of 1886 Anna noted that "we have two pigs laid down" for the table. And there was clearly milk and butter. There were abundant garden vegetables, and strawberries as well, a great favorite of the family (and a significant market garden crop for many farms in Ridgefield). There are references

138 JAW to EB, 6/8/91 JAW Papers AAA roll 125
139 JFW TO JAW, 8/23/92, JAW Papers, AAA roll 125
140 Mary Weir to JAW, 9/1/92, JAW Papers, AAA roll 125
141 JFW to JAW, 9/21/92, JAW Papers, AAA roll 125
143 ABW to EB, 5/24/86, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
to them extending from 1886 to 1913. Sometimes the demand for the
festive fruit outran the farm's capacity, and Julian once noted dealing
with what seem a truly extraordinary demand: "I have made
arrangements to have twenty-four baskets of strawberries each week, so
that those celebrated shortcakes of old are in vogue." This apparently
involved trade with a neighboring farmer extensively growing small fruits.
144 In 1918, the farm was still growing strawberries, and JAW noted that
600 raspberry bushes had been set out in October.145

Game was also on the bill of fare at Branchville, and in 1902 Julian
boasted that thanks to his hunting in November "we have had partridges
or quail for supper every night since Nov. 1st and still there hang
seasoning eight partridges and one quail." 146 In the earliest years at
least, farm produce (vegetables? berries? butter?) sometimes went home
with the Weirs to New York: "we will look for you at dinner on Monday and
will give you some of the products of Branchville to try."147

Albert Pinkham Ryder's painting Weir's Orchard (1885-90), along with
Mahonri Young's later drawings, reminds us that apples were another of
the farm's significant harvests. A number of references testify that cider,
barreled and allowed to ferment and turn alcoholic, was a favorite
beverage on the farm, as it had been in Connecticut since the 17th
century. Many New England farm families had given up on cider in the
temperance reformation of the early and mid 19th century, but the Weir
family clearly enjoyed its mildly alcoholic flavor and seems to have taken
it as vin ordinaire. An old friend in 1902 was assured of "a hearty
welcome" and told that when he arrived "Paul will have a new brand of

144 JAW to EB, 6/8/91; JAW to EB, 6/24/86; JAW to EBW, 5/9/13, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
145 JAW to CES Wood, 11/4/1918, JAW Papers AAA roll 126
146 JAW to CES Wood, 11/30/02, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
147 JAW to JFW, 1884?, JAW Papers AAA roll 125
cider.\textsuperscript{148} [Alsace, a French-German borderland, was traditionally an apple-growing and cider-making region.] The farm's practice was traditional for New England, having its apples "ground on shares" at a local cider mill (paid for in apples) and then stored away in the cellar. In 1883 Julian put down three casks for the family and one for the farmer.\textsuperscript{149} Paul Remy and his family were great consumers of cider, finishing "eight barrels since last Nov" in 1903.\textsuperscript{150} Thus although it was noted that in Fairfield County apples and cider "are nearly always saleable at fairly remunerative prices"\textsuperscript{151} it seems likely that most of the cider was consumed at home.\textsuperscript{152}

References are frequent in the correspondence to the blazing fires in the farmhouse in the colder months. Wood for fuel was abundant in copses on the farm, and a good bit of winter labor was surely expended, as was traditional, in getting it from the woods, cutting it to manageable length and letting it season a year, and cutting it to stove and fireplace length by the day or week of demand. But it is clear that by 1892, and perhaps from the beginning, cooking and heating water took place on a coal-fired stove; "before I came away," wrote John to Julian, "I had half a ton of coal put in to replace that we found there -- apart from what we consumed."\textsuperscript{153} By 1880, it was noted that coal had become the primary cooking fuel in rural Fairfield county.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{148} JAW to Wood, 9/18/02, JAW Papers AAA roll 125  
\textsuperscript{149} JAW to Mrs. Baker, 10/21/83, JAW Papers AAA roll 125  
\textsuperscript{150} JAW to CES Wood, 8/15/03, JAW Papers AAA roll 125  
\textsuperscript{151} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{153} JFW to JAW, 10/18/92, JAW Papers AAA roll 125  
\textsuperscript{154} William J. Jennison, "Fairfield County," \textit{Fourteenth Annual Report... Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1880-81} (Hartford, 1881) pp 258-262  
JAW Papers AAA roll 125  
\textsuperscript{154} JAW to JFW, 7/88, JAW Papers AAA Roll 125
The Changing Shape of Agriculture in Fairfield County

Data from the Federal Censuses of Agriculture, 1860-1945, for the rural towns of southwestern Connecticut tell an interesting and complex story of change, providing another interpretive context for the Weir Farm. In most respects they serve to highlight the romantic traditionalism of agriculture on the Weir, and then Young establishments. [The discussion refers to the attached chart and graphs.]

Census data for southwestern Connecticut reflect a decline in overall agricultural activity between 1900 and 1945 by some 60-70% of the quantity of what was produced. Gasoline power, refrigerator cars, economies of scale, cheaper land and labor elsewhere were the causes. They created the regionalization and nationalization of the marketing and distribution of agricultural commodities. Faster transportation, refrigeration, and the cost advantages of producers in northern New England and the Midwest eroded most of the locational advantages of Ridgefield and other southwestern Connecticut producers. They abandoned marginal crops, lands and herds – unless they had romantic reasons to continue farming.

Oxen. The number of oxen declined by 50% from 1860, when there were enough to provide a yoke for every farm in the county over 20 acres, to 1890. At that point the census ceased recording their number, clearly reflecting the assumption that they were dwindling into irrelevance as a source of motive power on the farm. [See Appendix, Chart, “Oxen in Fairfield County”.]

Horses. The number of horses on farms increased correspondingly to 1890 by nearly 60%, representing their increasing use to operate
powered machinery (which oxen could not do easily) and to provide transportation. Late-nineteenth century farmers were more likely to own carriages and surreys than those of 1860. Farm horses peaked in number in 1900, and then begun a steepening decline, reflecting their gradual replacement by gasoline-powered tractors, farm trucks, and automobiles, and a diminution of farming activity. By 1930 they were at less than a quarter of their 1900 number. An upsurge in 1935 reflects some return to less expensive traditional practices in the depths of the Depression, a time in which many rural people returned to fields and gardens in some measure to put food on the table. 1940 saw a return to the pattern of decline. [See Appendix, Chart, “Farm Horses in Fairfield County.”]

Cows and Dairying. Dairying reflected the greatest stability in the structure of regional agriculture. The number of dairy cattle on farms showed both modest increase and decline over time, differences in detail very likely relating to changes in the census count procedures. Milk sales figures stayed fairly even at close to 6,000,000 gallons a year over many decades, from 1890 through 1945. The continued expansion of the urban milkshed in New York and southwestern Connecticut was reaching out to Vermont and upstate New York and Connecticut’s dairy farms could not greatly expand. Cheese production had diminished virtually to nothing by 1900, and then showed a very modest upsurge for a couple of decades. After 1920, cheese was no longer shown in Connecticut agricultural data. Fairfield County butter was an important component of the dairy market through 1890, and then began a steep decline, to quite small amounts reported in 1940-45. [See Appendix, Charts, “Cheese Production in Fairfield County,” “Butter Production in Fairfield County,” “Milk Sold in Fairfield County,” and “Cows in Fairfield County.”]

Small Grains. As New England farming became ever more pastoral, the production of rye, oats and buckwheat all declined more or less steadily
since 1860. Buckwheat essentially disappeared by 1925; the decline in the production of oats closely correlated with the 20th-century decrease in the horse population. Rye fluctuated at levels between one-half and one-third of Civil War production until 1910, when it began a steep decline to levels of no more than 2 or 3% of previous production. [See Appendix, Charts, "Rye Production in Fairfield County," "Oats Production in Fairfield County," and "Buckwheat Production in Fairfield County."]

Hay. The county's hay production peaked in 1890 at nearly 100,000 tons, and then plateaued at the 79-80,000 ton level through 1920. It then declined by nearly 50% in 1930, a level where it remained in the 1940s. This change also correlates with the decline in the farm horse population, and with the much steeper decline in the market for hay to feed horses in the transportation system, as they were replaced by powered vehicles. [See Appendix, Chart, "Hay Production in Fairfield County."]

Corn. The corn harvest fluctuated unevenly between 1860 and 1910 with the vagaries of weather, and then declined to a level about 40% of previous average production between 1925-1945. We can trace this to a general decline in prices for livestock fodder. [See Appendix, Chart, "Corn Production in Fairfield County."]

Potatoes. Potato production had fluctuated substantially as well through 1910, with peaks in 1870 and 1900, before declining substantially from 1920 on. Connecticut grown potatoes were being priced out of the market by those from Maine and Idaho. [See Appendix, Chart, "Potato Production in Fairfield County."]

Eggs. The production of eggs continued to increase through 1945, the only agricultural commodity to do so. Locational advantages were still significant for this most fragile of "crops," as southwestern Connecticut
farmers continued to supply the New York market. [See Appendix, Chart, “Eggs Sold in Fairfield County.”] 155

The Persistence of Tradition

After J. Alden Weir’s death, the story of agriculture becomes the repetition of familiar themes, with some diminution and tradition-minded innovation. There was continuity in livestock and crops. Horses and cows remained on the farm, although oxen did not return. Poultry, probably in the same small flock size, continued to be raised. A farmer continued to work on the place, and the Mahonri Young drawings frequently show significant number of men at work at occasional labor in garden, orchard, cornfield, and hayfield. The farm garden continued, as, at least for some considerable period of time, did the raising of pigs.156 It is clear that the scale of operations declined and tillage fields and pasturelands were allowed to retreat into scrub woodlands. This was typical for most hill farms in the area, as their decline accelerated. Most kinds of farming output in Fairfield County declined in these years; hay production, corn, potatoes, small grains all diminished. Hay and corn continued as significant crops on the farm, but there is no evidence for further small


156 See Child Associates/Cynthia Zaitzevsky, “Cultural Landscape Report for Weir Farm National Historic Site,” 1995. This report’s treatment of “Farm, Vegetable Garden and Orchard,” during the Young occupancy, pp 149,155,162,166,168, fully reports on the limited documentary information available.
grain production. During World War II, with meat shortages and food rationing, the farm became a more important source of partial self-sufficiency to the Young family, and we have what seems to be the only documented reference to slaughtering on the farm — a pig “cut up and frozen stiff” in Mahonri Young’s etching room attached to his studio.

In one episode of innovation, Dorothy Weir Young became directly involved with dairying, an activity that the previous generation would surely have left to the “farmer’s wife.” It is also striking that she was interested in cheese-making — an activity that had been very rare in southwestern Connecticut for many years. This was innovation in the service of a return to long-past practices; it is far from certain that cheese was being made on the Beers farm in 1860, and not all likely that cheese-making was carried on during the Weir years. This may suggest a renewal in this matter of the almost “aggressive” traditionalism of the Weir Farm in the matter of draft animals and, possibly harvest technology.

Surviving Farm Vehicles and Machinery. Surviving equipment on the Weir Farm is, unsurprisingly, not specifically documented. The best preserved piece is a horse rake, with spring-steel teeth, very likely the same one so frequently sketched by Mahonri Young. There are the skeletal remains of a couple of 4-wheeled wagons, which may conceivably be those referred to in the 1920 inventory; it is more certainly likely that they were the vehicles depicted by Young in his haying sketches. There is the chassis of a relatively light two-wheeled vehicle, and what is almost certainly a horse-drawn manure spreader, made by the American Harrow Company of Detroit. Robert L. Ardrey, an early expert on agricultural machinery, described the manure spreader thus in 1894:
"The saving of manure and the putting it upon the land has been in the past a disagreeable feature of farm work, although every farmer understands the value, and in many parts of the country the necessity ... [the] manure spreader is intended to simplify this work, and at the same time do it more efficiently. A revolving toothed cylinder is mounted in the rear end of a wide, specially constructed wagon box, and in its operation throws the manure out in a thin, even layer, covering every part of the ground traversed. The wagon box has a movable bottom consisting of slats connected with each other by a link belt, and moving over numerous small rollers, so as to feed the load to the cylinder."157

Although the wooden components of the spreader are badly decayed, the toothed cylinder, slatted bottom, link belt, and rollers are still evident, as is the unusually wide wagon box. The spreader is not listed in the 1920 Weir inventory, and it is likely an artifact of the Young period on the farm. These implements appear to have been made in essentially the same form for several decades. Given the unpicturesque nature of the manuring process, it is not surprising that the manure spreader, although equally as important as the hayrake, was not pictured in Young's sketches.

Images of Tradition: Agricultural Work in the Mahonri Young Drawings, 1920's-1940s

Mahonri Young made numerous sketches of the people and scenes at Weir Farm over a period of more than 25 years. Of these, some 38 had enough information for detailed analysis. Obviously, Young's views were sketches, not detailed farm landscapes or genre scenes of work. Some

157 Robert L. Ardrey, American Agricultural Implements, p 1461
have informative dates and titles; many do not. They differ in amount and clarity of detail.  

Strikingly, it is traditionalism and continuity in farm operations, not change, that are visible in Mahonri Young’s drawings. With the exception of the pneumatic jackhammer pictured in 1927, there is nothing — except for styles in clothing — that would not have been familiar to J. Alden Weir in 1883. And, with the exception of the horse rake for hay, there is actually nothing that would not have been recognizable to Lewis Beers in 1860.

The single largest number of views are scenes of haying — but that is traditional in views of rural New England since the early nineteenth century. It was surely the most dramatic and important harvest on the farm, and it took place in summer when drawing outside was most comfortable. Corn harvesting and garden harvesting, as well as slaughtering and milking were less picturesque and were not pictured. Only the most elementary farm mechanization is displayed. We can see that the farm continued to have chickens and few ducks, to harvest its apples for eating and possibly still for cider making, to grow garden vegetables, and to carry out stone wall making, woods work, and some repairs to buildings. Oxen had finally disappeared as draft animals.

Haying

070195. "Branchville, 1935." This view appears to show haystacks, evidence for hay storage outside the barn.

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158 For this analysis the drawings have been organized by thematic agricultural groupings. The numerical order assigned them by the Brigham Young University Archives appears to be arbitrary, not chronological, and there are no specific dates for many drawings. The archival number has been provided in every case for reference. Where an actual title and date exist on the drawing, presumably by the author, they are enclosed in quotes. Descriptions presumably provided by those who sorted and archived the materials are enclosed in brackets. In some cases the analytical notes suggest different descriptions; the bracketed descriptions in those cases are followed by a question mark.
appears to be a two-wheeled farm cart pulled by two horses. The Weir inventory for 1920 did not include a cart specifically, although it may have been confused with a “farm wagon.”

080143. “Branchville July 3, 1949.” Hand mowers are at work in the foreground. Again it is clear that the vehicle depicted in the background is a horse rake. This view shows the first hay cutting underway in early July.

070259. [“Branchville haying 1938.”] A group of five men loading hay, on a two-horse, four-wheeled wagon, four below, one up. First haying here has begun in June, certainly quite late in June.

080192 “March 15, 1943.” If mid-March is the actual date of observation, then we are seeing hay being moved around the farm, perhaps from a haystack away from the barn, and brought nearer the animals. It may of course be a remembered view worked up from a sketchier sketch. It provides a full view of the farm’s two-horse wagon.

070617 [scything? should be “mowing with scythes”] and 70622 [scythe cutters? should be “mowers with scythes”] “Branchville 1931.” In the foreground of the first sketch a worker is mowing hay (the image’s designation in the archive index as “scything” would not have been used by Connecticut farmers) with a scythe whose curved “snathe” or wooden handle was affixed to the blade. This was a deeply traditional practice, many centuries old. Curved two-handled snathes and superior steel edged blades were common by the 1860s; by the 1930s, this was old fashioned indeed. It is barely possible that the vehicle in the background is a mowing machine, and the laborer is cutting around the places where the machine does not go. However, this notion is brought into question by the next sketch, which shows two men mowing with similar scythes in an
Larkin, “Weir Farm: Working Agriculture and the Vision of Rural Life”  59

open field. It is far more likely that it is a horserake. As noted before, the Weir Farm’s 1920 farm inventory did not include a mowing machine.

081094. “Branchville. March 15, 1943.” This sketch shows a farmer working on top of a haystack, used for outdoor storage of hay when the mows were full. Depending on the actual date of depiction, this farmer may either be throwing down hay that would be brought to the animals in their stalls for spring feeding or building the stack as he would have been doing the previous summer once the mows were full.

070266 [“Mowing at Branchville”] In the foreground a farmer drives a two-horse hayrake while another man rakes. An ox or cow is visible on the other side of the stone wall.

80193. “Branchville.” This is an excellent view of the final stage in the haying process. The horses have been backed into the English barn (in a New England style barn they could have been driven through) and a farmer is pitching hay into the mow with a fork. Another farmer may be there unseen in the mow to see to the proper placement of the hay.

070262. [“Mowing in the Orchard, Branchville.”] It is possible, although far from certain, that this sketch shows a mowing machine rather than a horse rake. Unfortunately, it is quite hastily drawn.

190195. [haystacks??] One the face of it, this view appears to show warmly dressed men tending or dealing with a fire. Haystacks do catch on fire from internal heat generation (spontaneous combustion) and it is possible that the men are dealing with this problem.
070269. “Branchville Barn.” This view pays homage to one of the less pleasant but highly important aspects of New England mixed agriculture — the manure pile — in earlier years sometimes called “black gold.” A farm worker is shoveling the precious stuff, which is vital for fertilizing corn and oat crops and even hay fields, out of the cattle stalls.

070263. “Branchville, Aug 1939.” This would not be a harvest scene for a regular corn crop, since it would be too early. It is more likely that it depicts cultivation, with the worker hoeing around the corn plants for the fourth and final time in the cultivation sequence.

Gardening

070225. “The Cold Frame. Branchville March 1942.” A man and women, it appears, are preparing the bed of soil, with soil, compost and/or manure from the wheelbarrow, for “forcing” plants in the early spring. The glass panes of the cold frame have been removed while this work goes on. The frame itself appears virtually identical to the reproduction 1830’s frame built by Old Sturbridge Village for the Parsonage vegetable garden.

070235. “Branchville March 29, 1930.” These men are working in the garden in the chill of early spring, most likely using hoes and rakes to clear it for planting. The astonishing thing is to see so many workers toiling in this relatively small plot, so different from the usual dire labor shortage on New England farms.

190159. “Branchville ‘39.” The furrows visible here suggest that the garden was plowed rather than spaded by hand.

190196. [barn] A man is clearly shown digging with a spade near the barn while another figure bends over at some task. But it is not clear whether
they are turning over the soil, digging a trench, or preparing to plant a shrub.

080134. “Bass digging parsnips Nov 1942” Mr. Bass is digging up a frost-resistant fall root crop for storage and winter eating.

The Orchard
070210. “Apple Picking at Branchville, Oct 1936.” This view, with five workmen shown picking the harvest, suggests that the Weir farm orchard remained fairly extensive — at least enough for a work gang of five men to be picking. The work practices shown are fairly traditional; they have altered little over time from the eighteenth century, except for the clothing and ethnicity of the workers and the substitution of metal pails for hooped buckets. Three of the men are working a single large tree (its size suggests that it is quite old) with buckets. One is picking the “drops” while a fifth appears to be sacking apples that have been harvested.

Cutting Trees and Wood
070637. [Sawing boards? Should be “sawing log”] Here in the farmyard two men saw a log on a trestle or sawhorse with a two-handed cross cut saw. The sketchy image does not seem to have the log properly mounted on the trestle; the men are cutting toward its far end and perhaps have it balanced. Chickens walk around in the scene, along with two women, one holding a pail in her arms — perhaps to feed the chickens. The other carries two pails in the classic “milkmaid’s” posture — perhaps she has finished milking.

070645 “Blasted Elm 1952.” This view shows men with axes and crosscut saws at work. In “Blasted Elm” three men are cutting up for disposal — presumably to the woodpile- the large elm that has fallen and brought
down a section of the dooryard's rustic fence originally put in place by J. Alden Weir early in the 1880s.

070646 [sawing wood] This untitled view shows two men working on a tree at a point where woodlot adjoins pasture, using the stone pasture wall to prop up one end of the trunk as they saw it up. The axes which they have used to chop the tree down are visible to the right.

070648. [sawing wood] This view shows a man at work in cold weather, sawing up what we can safely assume is firewood on the sawhorse with a bucksaw.

070193. [blasted elm 1952] A close-up view of the lightning-struck tree and the damage it did to the rustic dooryard fence on the Farm. An ax is visible propped against the fallen trunk.

Livestock

090090 [chicken yard Branchville, 1941] The flock pictured here, centered around a tub that has had feed in it, seems to be about the modest size of the Weir inventory flock—a couple of dozen. The “chicken wire” stapled around the chicken house window is clearly visible.

010202.[chickens and ducks in yard?] In this view, the chicken house, seen from the opposite end shown in the 1941 view, and the chickens and ducks, are clearly visible.

190281. [pigs at trough] Four pigs are shown at the trough, a fairly sizable number for a farm this size. They would produce a substantial amount of meat when, slaughtered, with a good deal to trade. This may suggest the “pig-intensive” years of the War.
080402. “May 1943 Branchville.” Two horses graze in a Branchville pasture. It seems unlikely that the farm owned more than two (the 1920 inventory has only one) The haying scenes frequently show 4 horses in use to haul hay and power the horserake. It is probable that the “extra” horses were exchanged for with neighbors along with the work of men to hay.

Farmyard Scenes
071095.[sawhorse and rain barrel] This is a carefully composed farmyard scene near the house, with chopping block and ax (a poor way to store an ax, all the farm manuals agreed, because it would lead to rust of the blade and rot of the handle) a sawhorse, and the rain water barrel with its entry pipe from the roof gutter clearly displayed.

074102. [washline and barn] Traditional women’s work on a windy day. Unfortunately it’s not quite clear where and what the clothesline supports were – trees, poles, or the barn?

Agricultural Landscape
190197. A typical New England upland farm landscape near the “homelot.” Two horses graze in a stubbly pasture – the taller plants are the ones they don’t like to eat – with an upland mowing field enclosed by a stone wall and pasture gate.

Stone Walls
040321. “Joe Knoche builds a wall” Workmen in overalls and caps – workmen’s garb of 20’s and 30’s building a substantial “dressed” stone wall. The lower courses are large and irregular stones, often round, which have been roughly fitted together and chinked with smaller stones, just as ordinary farm walls were built. The upper sections are smaller and flatter in cross-section – some selected for the purpose and others
broken and shaped on the spot, as one worker (Joe Knoche, the master stoneworker?) is doing, while the others move larger base stones. The topmost course is quite smooth and flat. Visible are the tools of the trade - a crowbar, two large sledgehammers, and a smaller stone hammer in Joe Knoche’s hand.

Construction

070224. “Shingling the Corn Crib, July 24, 1932.” This view shows men engaged in a farmer’s project that would have been recognizable to a farmer at any point in the farm’s history. The scaffolding the two men are using, of lashed and nailed-together timbers and boards, is very similar to documented nineteenth-century arrangements.

080240. “Trench and excavation from well house April 12, 1927.” This view of work on the well house shows the use of power technology – a pneumatic “jackhammer” presumably powered by a portable gasoline engine not visible in the picture. This seems to be the only farm view showing 20th-century technology.

Roadways

070265. [Branchville garden, 1934]. 071073. [Wilton road sign] In both these scenes showing the stonewalled garden enclosure at the road corner, one interesting feature is the traditional signpost or “guideboard” in the left foreground, pointing the way to the town of “Wilton” on the visible board and presumably to “Ridgefield” on the other. These guideboards in this form had been required by law at road intersections since late in the eighteenth century; they had to be painted white with black lettering, had to be at least seven feet high. This practice was maintained well into the 20th century.
Fig. 8.—SELF-CLOSING CATTLE STANCHION.

Fig. 24.—CONVENIENT GRAIN BIN.

Fig. 15.—SIMPLE PIG TROUGH.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustration on following page

New England Farm Tools at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

This retrospective drawing displays the equipment of the pre-industrial New England farm. These were the implements used to work the farm in its earliest years, and some of them remained in use throughout the 19th century. The woodcut shows:

(Top left to right):
Scythe [hay harvest]
Manure fork
Wooden moldboard iron-shod plow
Hayrake (with peg teeth)
Grain Flail [threshing grain]

(Bottom left to right)
Hay rake
Ox yoke
Sickle [grain harvest]
Iron-shod shovel
Wooden pitchfork [hay and fodder]
“A-frame” harrow [preparing the soil]
Axe
Hoe [cultivating corn, potatoes and garden crops]

Charles L. Flint, et. al., Eighty Years Progress of the United States (Hartford, Connecticut: Judd and Andrus, 1867)
Caption for illustration on following page
Farm tools in use in 1790. (Smithsonian Institution.)
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Improved Farm Implements in New England, ca. 1870

This is a view of the farm implements available by the late 1860s - before massive mechanization had come to New England, but after specialized farm implement manufacturing had become a significant industry in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Top Left to Right:
Wedges and stone tools
Ladder
Hoes and choppers [cultivating corn, garden, potatoes]
Grain cradle
Scythe blades of various sizes
Iron and steel shovels
Pitchforks
Hayrake
Manure forks
Pitchforks
Grain shovel
Chains for plowing

Middle Left:
Scythe snathes (handles)
Shears, axes, cutting knives, hatchets
Ox yoke
Gimlet (for fence posts)
Apple corer
Butter churns
Cock weathervane for barn
Hay press [compressing and baling hay for compact storage]

Bottom Left to Right
Grindstone
Steel plow
Horse cultivator
Horse rake
Crank butter churn
Corn sheller
Treadle horsepower [for powering large shellers, choppers, threshers]
Long-handled hay knives [for cutting hay]
Plow weathervane for barn
Winnowing machine (fanning mill)

Charles L. Flint, et. al., *Eighty Years Progress of the United States* (Hartford, Connecticut: Judd and Andrus, 1867)
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Caption for illustrations on following page

Barn equipment

These illustrations convey typical late-19th century farm practice. The arrangement of cattle stanchions in the barn, the grain bin for holding the feed for livestock that supplemented feedings with hay — probably oats, and a trough for feeding the pigs are all items that would have been fixtures, in something like these forms, around the Weir barn.

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Caption for illustrations on following page

Barn equipment

Tub and Potato Bin: Two of the most familiar, taken-for-granted pieces of barn equipment, a staved tub and a slatted bin for storing potatoes that allowed ventilation.

Fig. 91.—TUB FOR WASHER.

Fig. 68.—Panel of potato bin.  Fig. 69.—Slatted box for potatoes.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Barn equipment

The forks are for handling grain and hay in the barn. The hay hook is for cutting hay out of a stack or when it has become heavily bundled or bunched up in the mow. The hand-cranked grindstone was a necessity for keeping edge tools – scythes, axes, corn knives, hay hooks – sharp.

Fig. 77.—LARGE CHAFF FORK.  
Fig. 78.—SIMPLE CHAFF FORK.  
Fig. 81.—STRAW OR HAY HOOK.  
Fig. 70.—GRINDSTONE SET.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Plows

Eagle Plow: New England's most popular ox- and horse-drawn plough from mid-century through 1870s.

Deere Clipper Plow: An improved version made in the Midwest; by the 1880s widely used in New England; again for both ox- and horse teams.

Leo Rabin, The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Productivity of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States During the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931)
Fig. 7. The Eagle Plow with "cutter," as made by Ruggles, Nourse and Mason (from *American Agriculturist*, 5(1846):79). "We consider it the most perfect plow in the United States for general work. It will turn a furrow from 12 inches deep, and from 10 to 18 inches wide, according to the size used, and the requirements of the plowman." *Ibid.*, editor.

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Fig. 11. Deere’s Improved Clipper Steel Plow (from *Country Gentleman*, 10(1857):129).
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustration on following page

Plowing in 1899

Here on a stone-walled New England tillage field a farmer plows with a yoke of oxen and a steel plough that might well have been the John Deere "Clipper," while another guides the oxen. This was already a relatively uncommon scene in southern New England. The Weir farm saw virtually identical scenes from its beginnings in the 1780s up through 1920.

George E. Tingley Photograph 1899. Library of Congress
Through the ages, the plow has been the most important tool for tilling the soil. This New England farmer is using oxen to pull an iron-beamed walking or swing plow. (George E. Tingley photo. 1899. Library of Congress.)
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for Illustrations on following page

Harrs

A "primitive" brush harrow, literally made of twigs loosely tied to a crosspiece and drawn by a chain. A more "modern" version, with the brush trimmed, sized and regularly set in a frame. Both were used to cover the soil after plowing and seeding. An improved triangular or "A" harrow that came into use in the 1840s.

Leo Rogin, The Introduction of Farm Machinery in Its Relation to the Productivity of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States during the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931)

R. Douglas Hurt, American Farm Tools: From Hand Power to Steam-Power (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982)
During the mid-1840s, farmers began using the Geddes harrow. It was the most popular triangular harrow of that era.

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Fig. 22. From *Country Gentleman*, 48(1883):436. Illustration probably represents type of brush harrow most commonly in use from the beginning of the century.
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Caption for illustrations on following page

Harrow

A sequence of improvement in harrows, tools that finished the work of the plow. "A frame" harrow, typical of early 19th century New England farms; square spike harrow, widely used by the 1830s-1860s; a triangular horse drawn riding harrow with discs instead of teeth, sometimes found in New England after 1870.

R. Douglas Hurt, American Farm Tools: From Hand Power to Steam-Power (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982)

A hand cultivator for close-in work, primarily in farm gardens.

A Descriptive and Illustrated Catalog ... Agricultural Implements and Machines. Nourse Mason & Co. (Worcester, MA: Henry Howland, 1857) fig 73
The Hand Cultivator

During the late 1890s, the Hand Cultivator was popular. The first version of the Hand Cultivator was invented in 1892. It was a simple device that could be easily operated by one person. The Cultivator was used to loosen the soil before planting, and it was also used to cultivate the soil after planting. The Cultivator was operated by hand, and it was a great improvement over the existing hand tools. The Cultivator was a major factor in the increase of crop yields in the late 19th century.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Spring tooth harrows and cultivators

Spring-tooth harrows were coming widely into use after 1880; these were likely the type used on the Weir farm, at least from in the 1890s on. The one-horse cultivator was useful in large gardens and small tillage fields. On the Weir farm it was likely used for corn cultivation.

By the mid-1880s, many farmers preferred the spring-tooth harrow. The teeth of this harrow were made from spring steel and each flexed over obstructions without breaking. Spring-tooth harrows were made with either wood or iron frames.

The expandable, one-horse cultivator appeared on the market, during the 1820s. By the late nineteenth century, the walking cultivator could be purchased with spike- or spring-teeth or shovels. The spring-tooth model was popular among farmers who cultivated small fields.
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Horse-drawn row marker and roller

The row marker is a horse-drawn implement used to mark rows for cultivation; it was normally drawn by a single horse. The roller is normally a two-horse implement — as can be seen from its two whippetrees; it is used to crush clods left over from plowing and harrowing.

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Caption for illustration on following page

Horse-drawn rollers

These are more expensive variations on the two-horse farm rollers, made with steel cylinders or steel bars set in a cylindrical shape.

Rollers and clod crushers were made with steel or corrugated bars. These implements were used to crush large chunks of soil, left by the plow, before planting the crop.
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Caption for illustrations on following page

Sickle, cradle scythe

Sickle: Prehistoric in origin, the most traditional reaping implement for small grains used on this, and all other New England farms before 1840-50, and still in use in a few places by the 1880s.

Grain Cradle: Beginning to be widely used on New England farms for small grains by the 1840s; would have been nearly universal by 1880s. Without its wooden "fingers," the scythe was the long-traditional implement for haying.
Until the late eighteenth century, farmers used the sickle to harvest their grain crops. The sickle has remained virtually unchanged for nearly 6,000 years, except that it is now made from iron instead of clay. (Smithsonian Institution.)
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Harvesting grain with sickle, and harvesting with cradle scythe

Harvesting technology in New England before the advent of the reaping machine; which was in use on substantial farms by the 1870s and 80s. However, many farms never adopted this technology, either harvesting by hand or trading for a few days’ work reaping with a better-equipped neighbor.

Grain Cradle: Beginning to be widely used on New England farms for small grains by the 1840s; it would have been nearly universal by 1880s.

Above: The cradle scythe deposited the cut grain in a pile ready for binding. A skilled worker could cut three times as much grain with a cradle scythe as with a sickle. (International Harvester.)

In order to harvest grain with a sickle, the reaper had to bend down, grab a handful of stalks with one hand and draw the sickle through the grain with the other. Harvesting with a sickle was back-breaking work. (Smithsonian Institution.)
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Threshing and winnowing

Hand threshing on the barn floor with wooden flails was the traditional way to process rye, buckwheat and oats. Horsepowered threshers were available by 1880s, but not used on all farms.

Fanning mills or winnowing machines were an early-nineteenth century solution to the problem of separating the grain from the chaff. Threshed grain was poured in the hopper, shaken, and chaff blown out the front. Both the 1860 and 1920 farm inventories mention such a device.

Leo Rogin, The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Productivity of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States During the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931; R. Douglas Hurt, American Farm Tools: From Hand Power to Steam-Power (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982)
Fig. 64. Elliot’s Patent Horizontal Winnowing Mill (from advertisement in New England Farmer, 12(1834):249).

The fanning mill—
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustration on following page

Haying equipment

Horse-drawn hayrakes, replacing hand-raking, became virtually universal in New England by the 1870s. The earliest versions used wooden teeth, and some wooden-toothed horserakes were used into the 1880s. Most hayrakes, however, had teeth of spring-steel. The operator would lower the teeth to begin raking, and raise them to release his load when the rake was full. A horse rake was acquired by the Farm at some time after 1860; likely enough, before Weir bought the property.

R. Douglas Hurt, American Farm Tools: From Hand Power to Steam-Power (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982)
The wooden-tooth sulky rake became popular during the 1850s. By the next decade, however, most sulky rakes were fitted with spring-teeth.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements,
Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustration on following page

Haying equipment

Mowing Machine. Horse-drawn mowing machines transmitted rotary power from gearing affixed to the moving wheels to their reciprocating sidebar cutters. They were widely adopted in the 1870s and 1880s, although some New England farms waited a decade or two longer.

WALTER A. WOOD'S NEW JOINTED BAR MOWER PASSING AN OBSTRUCTION.

The Price of this Mower delivered on the Cars at Hoosick Falls, including two Scythes, one Guard, two Sections, one Wrench, one Oil Can, Neck Yoke, Evener and Whiffletree, is $135 Cash.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Harvesting corn

Corn harvests in New England long remained, for the most part, unmechanized. The process proved one of the most difficult to transform. Here men are harvesting the ears by hand, pulling the stalks. The stalks will be separately collected to be chopped into fodder.

"Corn Harvest ca 1890" Library of Congress
Larkin, “Weir Farm: Working Agriculture and the Vision of Rural Life”

A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Corn shells

These hand-cranked devices separated the kernels from the cob for the preparation of corn for grinding – for cornmeal or animal feed.

R. Douglas Hurt, American Farm Tools: From Hand Power to Steam-Power (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982)
Corn shellers stripped the kernels from the cob. The corn fell into a basket and the cobs dropped away through another opening. During the 1840s, the Burrall corn sheller was popular.
Fig. 86.—HOME-MADE CART.
Fodder-choppers were used to cut corn and other forage crops into small pieces. Company of Salem, Ohio, for the 1895 season.

These lever and crank models were built by the Silver Manufacturing
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustration on following page

Fodder choppers

Hand-cranked fodder choppers or feed choppers mechanized the time consuming task of cutting up corn stalks and other silage for livestock fodder.

A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustration on following page

Farm vehicles — wagon

A working late-19th-century farm wagon shown in a wagon or carriage shed, along with the sort of crude “home-made” cart that farmers often constructed out of spare wheels and axle.

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Caption for illustration on following page

Farm vehicles — wagons

One Horse Farm Wagons. Models generally characteristic of those in use on virtually all Connecticut farms 1880-1910.

ONE-HORSE FARM WAGON. A more modern vehicle, with iron hubs and riveted reinforcements at outer ends of spokes. A small wagon of this type had a body 90 by 40 inches, with wheels 38 and 44 inches. Weight 500 lbs.; load 800 lbs. Farm wagons along these general lines are still being made by some firms.

ONE-HORSE FARM WAGON. A light, standard utility wagon. Large model had a bed 9 feet long by 46 inches wide. Wheels 40 and 44 inches; track 60 inches. Total weight of wagon was 825 lbs. Note heavy wood hubs used here.
A Visual Archive of New England Farm Implements, Tools, Vehicles and Livestock

Caption for illustrations on following page

Farm vehicles – wagon

Farm Wagon Unloading Produce, 1905. A “market-gardening” farmer’s wagon is shown being unloaded at the railhead.

Photograph, Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, New York
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Farm vehicles – wagon

Farm Wagon Loaded with Cabbages, 1905.

Photograph, Nassau County Museum, Long Island
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Caption for illustrations on following page

Farm vehicles — sleds

Two common sled types are illustrated. One was commonly used for hauling lumber in the winter. The other was designed to substitute, in ice and snow, for the common two wheeled ox-cart; it was easy to tilt. A good view of an oxcart can be obtained in the "Plowing in New England 1899" photograph.

A DUMP-SLED.

A method of constructing a dump-sled for hauling earth and other substances, is shown in Fig. 44. It will be appreciated by many northern
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for illustrations on following page

Passenger vehicles

Surreys: Examples of the vehicle mentioned in the Weir correspondence: relatively light, elegant one-horse carriages, usually with a top (fringed at times) A carriage reasonably comparable to these made the trip from the Farm to Branchville Station.

PONY SURREY. A small, light surrey to be drawn by one or two ponies. Body was 30 inches wide, with wheels 30 and 38 inches. (Smaller wheel size given in all descriptions is always for front wheel.) Track, or width from outside of one wheel to outside of opposite wheel, was 45 inches.

SURREY. This photograph of a canopy-top surrey reveals the smartness of this popular "turn-out," although it indicates at the same time how the usual photograph obscures details of construction. Such details are shown best only in carriage makers' illustrations. (Studebaker photo.)
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Passenger vehicles

Carriage Stuck on a Bad Road, 1898

Photograph, Museums at Stony Brook
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Caption for illustration on following page

Passenger vehicles – sleigh

A ca. 1860 view of a farm sleigh

Daguerreotype, Museums at Stony Brook, Long Island, NY
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Caption for illustrations on following page

New England dairy cattle

The Short-horn, a type that Connecticut farmers had been raising since very early in the nineteenth century. They were durable, provided both milk and meat.

Jersey cows: the first such animals had been introduced into New England around 1820, but they were an exotic novelty for several decades. Jerseys were a milk, not a dual purpose cow as evident in their less robust, less "beefy" shape.

Charles L. Flint, *Milch Cows and Dairy Farming... Embodying the Most Recent Improvements, and Adapted to Farming in the United States...* (Boston: A. Williams and Co.; 1858)
SHORT-HORNS.—ORIGIN.

extent; or, if they ever were, no traces of them as a distinct breed can now be found here.

Fig. 6. Short-horn Cow

Fig. 8. Jersey Cow
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aption for illustrations on following page

New England dairy cattle

Imported Dutch Cow. The Friesian or Holstein breed, coming to be regarded in the 1880s as the best all-around dairy cow for productivity, quality of milk, and hardiness.

Devon Cow. Another old English breed frequently found in 18th and 19th-century New England farms and often crossed with Devons and “native cattle.”

Charles L. Flint, *Milch Cows and Dairy Farming ... Embodying the Most Recent Improvements, and Adapted to Farming in the United States ...* (Boston: A. Williams and Co., 1858)
Fig. 7. Imported Dutch Cow.

Fig. 11. Devon Cow.
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Caption for illustration on following page

England dairy cattle

Alderney Bull, Cow and Calf. One of the Channel Island breeds popular among genteel farmers in the late-nineteenth century Northeast. This "peaceable kingdom" livestock portrait by a member of the Royal Academy would surely have charmed J. Alden Weir.

ALDERNEY BULL, COW AND CALF
James Ward, R. A., 1822
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Caption for illustration on following page

"Old Farmer Fogy’s Fowls"

An illustration of the miscellaneous and somewhat bedraggled appearance of traditional New England barnyard or “dunghill fowl.” Birds such as these (the picture is something of a caricature) were kept on this farmstead for generations, almost certainly up through mid-century, and likely up to the end of the Beers occupancy of the farm.
The Bantams.

Since the first introduction of the Bantam breed of fowls they have ramified into many varieties, none of which are destitute of elegance, while some, indeed, are remarkably beautiful. All are, or ought to be, of small size, but lively and vigorous, exhibiting in their movements both grace and stateliness.
Chart 6

Farm Horses in Ridgefield County 1860-1945

Year

1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945
Oxen in Fairfield County
Cheese Production in Fairfield County 1860-1920 (pounds)
Butter Production in Fairfield County 1860-1925

Year

1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1925
Milk Production in Fairfield County

Milk Sold in Fairfield County 1870-1945

Year:
- 1860
- 1870
- 1880
- 1890
- 1900
- 1910
- 1920
- 1925
- 1930
- 1935
- 1940
- 1945

Milk sold
Chart 20

Cows in Fairfield County 1860-1945

Year

1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945
Chart21

Rye Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945 (bushels)
Oats Production in Fairfield County 1850-1945

Oats Produced in Fairfield County 1860-1945 (bushels)
Hay Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945 (tons)
Chart 14

Corn Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945

Year
1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945

Corn Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945 (bushels)
Chart 18

Potato Production in Fairfield County

Potato Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
(bushels)

Year

1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945
Egg Production in Fairfield County

Eggs Sold in Fairfield County 1880-1945 (dozens)
OLD FARMER FOGY'S FOWLS.
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Caption for illustration on following page

Fancy poultry house

An illustration of the most elaborate designed poultry houses on “gentleman’s estates.” It is a veritable palace for the birds in the bracketed style. A young woman and a little girl feed fancy fowl.

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Caption for illustration on following page

Poultry house

Poultry writer W.M. Lewis offered two plans for a "cheap poultry house" for a flock of 20 or 30 birds to his New England and New York readers.

...rown aside their old houses and built after my plan. The roosts for the fowls should be often renewed, and always of sassafras, as the smell of that wood is deleterious to the vermin on poultry. The floor in the sitting room should always be kept perfectly clean, and continually covered with plank floor. It is twelve feet long, eight feet wide, and seven feet high, from the bottom of the sill to the top of the plate.

*Fig. 1.* View of the east end; A, a door, two feet wide and five feet high; E, a small window for ventilation.

*Fig. 2.* View of the west end; N N, two holes one foot square for the entrance of the fowls; F, a door to throw out the manure; it turns up and ends at E; C C, windows with small wire grates.
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Caption for illustration on following page

White Dorking Cock

Perhaps the most popular progressive New England breed at the end of the 19th century.

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Caption for illustration on following page

Pair of White Shanghaes

Late-19th century breed

Being more quiet in their habits, and less inclined to ramble, the hens are invaluable as incubators and nurses; and the mildness of their disposition makes them excellent foster-mothers, as they never injure the chickens belonging to other hens.
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Caption for illustrations on following page

Buff Cochin China

Popular breed in New England. Originally from Indochina

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Caption for illustrations on following page

Poland Cock and Hen

Popular European breed in New England; thought to do well on smaller farms.

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Caption for illustrations on following page

Pair of White Leghorns

Originally bred in Italy (Livorno or Leghorn) another popular breed for New England farmers. Hardy and productive of eggs.

PAIR OF WHITE LEGHORNS.
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Caption for illustrations on following page

Brahma Hen and Cock

One of the breeds involved in the poultry breeding “craze” of the late nineteenth century. Thought of as a beautiful, “showy” bird in the barnyard.

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Caption for illustrations on following page

Houdan and Creve-Coeurs

Showy but highly impractical French fowl brought to some New England farms as part of the breeding craze. Egg and meat production were an afterthought to their owners.

Appendix:
Charts: Agriculture in Fairfield County 1860-1945

Oxen in Fairfield County 1860-1890
Farm Horses in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Cheese Production in Fairfield County 1860-1920
Butter Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Milk Production (Sold) in Fairfield County 1870-1945
Cows in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Rye Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Oats Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Buckwheat Production in Fairfield County 1860-1925
Hay Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Corn Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Potato Production in Fairfield County 1860-1945
Egg Production (Sold) in Fairfield County 1880-1945

Appendix: The Agricultural Drawings of Mahonri Young

Mahonri Young's sketches containing agricultural information, 1920s-1940s, are presented in the order in which they are discussed in the text of the report, pages 56-64.
"Mowing at Branchville"
"Mowing the Orchard, Branchville"
Branchville in the garden: 1930
(March 9th, 1923)
"Sawing Wood"
"Chicken yard, Branchville
1941"
"Sawhorse and rain barrel."
"Shingling the Corn Crib, 1932"
Digging trench from well 1927

Trench and rear view from well town April 1927

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